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Scapegoats of Wrath, Subjects of Benevolence: Turkey's Minorities Under Erdoğan

By Aykan Erdemir

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN'S TURKISH GOVERNMENT OVER THE COURSE of the last 16 years has demonstrated a mixed track record with regard to religious minorities, characterized both by gestures of benevolence, as well as egregious scapegoating and persecution of the same groups. This has been especially true in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in July 2016. What appear to be inconsistencies in the Turkish government's rhetoric and policy toward minorities are, in fact, various modalities of a coherent neo-Islamist strategy of instrumentalizing minorities. Erdoğan has used this strategy to consolidate power at home and to pursue foreign policy goals abroad.

When 47-year-old Erdoğan established the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2001, he claimed to have broken with his Islamist past and defined the orientation of his new party as "conservative democratic," likening it to the Christian Democrats of Europe.¹ This promise should have entailed a sharp break

in rhetoric and policy with his mentor Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of five successive Islamist parties between 1970 and 2011. Erbakan was known for his anti-Semitic and anti-Christian worldview and rants.²

What differentiates Erdoğan's neo-Islamism from Erbakan's Islamism is the systematic dissimulation effort the former has undertaken to portray his party's ideology as democratic, inclusive, and tolerant. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Erdoğan has been building a majoritarian and authoritarian regime, pursuing social engineering, and pivoting Turkey from the transatlantic alliance and its values.

Taken at face value, the AKP's 16 years of behavior while in power offers a bewildering array of contradictory discourses and practices, ranging from ostensibly warm embraces of minorities to the vilest smears and hate speech. In Erdoğan's schizophrenic rhetoric, for example, the word "Armenian" has appeared both as a term of endearment, as in his call to "our Armenian brothers," as well as a word of insult that he felt the need to precede by, "I beg your pardon..."^{3,4}

For example, at the policy level, Erdoğan has overseen the most ambitious restitution process for non-Muslim minority foundations in the history of the Turkish Republic.⁵ At the same time he has also made damaging attempts to block those same foundations from holding elections for their boards, thereby bringing these institutions to the brink of extinction.⁶

Making sense of the apparent contradictions in the Erdoğan government's policy and discourse toward minorities requires situating them in their respective contexts, as well as mapping the domestic and global parameters that shaped them. What appears to be contradictory at first glance fits into an overall neo-Islamist game plan that reinforces sectarian hierarchies, institutionalizes discrimination, transforms rights into discretionary benevolent acts, and solidifies majoritarian hegemony.

An holistic and contextualized look at the AKP's rhetoric and policy reveals the following four modalities of the Turkish government's policy:

1. Scapegoating of and incitement against minorities to mobilize the electorate, solidify the ranks of loyalists, and strengthen majoritarian hegemony at home.
2. Propagating conspiracy theories about minorities to divert the Turkish public's attention from the government's policy failures.
3. Performing acts of neo-Ottoman "benevolence" to portray the regime and its leadership as "tolerant" at home and abroad, while

also highlighting and reinforcing sectarian hierarchies between the ruling majority and subject minorities.

4. Implementing policies ranging from benevolent to nefarious toward minorities to ensure favorable treatment or to extract concessions in international relations.

The AKP's Early Years

THE AKP'S RISE TO POWER WITH THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER 2002—a year after Erdoğan's founding of the party—was the result of Turkey's 2001 economic crisis and the ensuing electoral discontent that reshuffled the country's political landscape and eliminated mainstream political parties from parliament.⁷ During the AKP's early years in power, Erdoğan was busy providing assurances both to Turkey's pro-secular electorate and to the country's Western allies that he was a moderate politician who had left his Islamist past behind.

A key tactic Erdoğan deployed in those early years was to signal his “reformist” approach by pursuing a more liberal attitude toward minorities.⁸ Turkey is home to a wide range of ethnic and religious minorities. While Kurds comprise almost 20 percent of the population, the country is also home to Albanians, Circassians, Georgians, and Arabs, among others. In addition to the Alevi community, who make up approximately 10 percent of the population, other major faith communities include Armenians, Jews, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Christians, Latin Catholics, Protestants, and the Bahai. Although Turkey is nominally a secular state that stipulates equal treatment of all citizens, successive governments across the political spectrum had failed to accommodate the country's cultural diversity and guarantee citizens freedom for and from religion—a shortcoming Erdoğan saw as an opportunity.

The principle of secularism (*laiklik*) is enshrined in the Turkish Constitution's preamble as well as its articles 2, 13, 14, 68, 81, 103, 136, and 174.⁹ Most Turkish politicians and voters across the political spectrum, however, fail to perceive secularism as separation of religion and state, and freedom both for and from religion. Hence, the term continues to be perceived and implemented as the state's control over religion. In practice, this peculiar understanding leads to a sectarian regime: Sunni Islam of the Hanafi rite, the government's preferred and privileged

form of faith, dominates all other faiths and confessions. It was Erdoğan's neo-Islamist rule that brought this underlying logic to the fore with full force, aligning the energies of his party, state bureaucracy, the media, and loyal followers to institutionalize majoritarian and sectarian regime.

Erdoğan's attempts to reach out to religious minorities, by restituting confiscated property, restoring a number of churches and synagogues, and closer engagement with faith leaders were welcomed not only by minority communities, but also by Erdoğan's liberal allies in Turkey and interlocutors in the European Union. As such, these policies played a key role in legitimizing Erdoğan. But at the same time, he was busy consolidating his rule by gradually eliminating all institutions that could serve as checks and balances.

Erdoğan's outreach to minorities were less an attempt to institutionalize equal treatment of all citizens before the law, and more a demonstration of his tolerance and benevolence toward subjects, echoing the Ottoman treatment of *subjects*.

Over the years, as Erdoğan increasingly consolidated his one-man rule, he felt less need to secure the support of liberal allies at home, or the legitimacy that Turkey's European Union accession process granted. This, in turn, diminished his need for spectacles of tolerance and inclusion, and gradually gave way to scapegoating minorities to rally his support base.

In 2014, Erdogan claimed that "new voluntary Lawrences," referring to the British army officer T. E. Lawrence who orchestrated Arab revolts against Ottomans during World War I, were "disguised as journalists, religious men, writers and terrorists," accusing them of "making Sykes-Picot agreements" once again to carve up Turkish territory.¹⁰ In 2017, he again used the same trope of "new Lawrences," in an anti-Kurdish and anti-Semitic polemic about the independence referendum of Iraqi Kurdistan.¹¹ Over the years, the presentation of Turkey's ethnic and religious minorities as fifth columns susceptible to foreign meddling has become one of Erdogan's key strategies to sustain his rule.¹²

Turkey's 2016 abortive coup, the ensuing state of emergency, and Erdoğan's ongoing alliance with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) have intensified further this toxic climate for minorities, as they became systematic targets of state-sanctioned hate and prejudice.¹³

The Toxic Climate of Post-Coup Turkey for Minorities

STATE-SANCTIONED SCAPEGOATING OF, INCITEMENT AGAINST, AND PERSECUTION of Turkey's ethnic and religious minorities are not unique to the AKP's 16-year rule. In fact, there is a long-established pattern that can be traced back to both the Ottoman and Republican periods.¹⁴ What merits special attention is the way in which the AKP has over the years systematized and institutionalized such practices through a well-funded and meticulously orchestrated campaign, involving state and party apparatuses as well as print, visual, and digital media.¹⁵

Turkey's draconian state of emergency has undermined human rights, the rule of law, due process, and attorney-client privilege, precipitating an especially toxic climate for Turkey's most vulnerable groups.¹⁶

Although Turkey's religious minorities were quick to demonstrate their loyalty to their homeland in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt, they still became victims of a wave of hatred and violence for their supposed "complicity" in the coup. The day after the abortive attempt, the religious leaders of the Jewish, Syriac, Armenian, and Greek Orthodox communities denounced it in a joint declaration, joined later by representatives of the Alevi and Shiite faiths.^{17, 18, 19} These gestures, however, did not suffice to shield them from the rising anti-minority sentiment of government supporters.

On August 7, 2016, in a demonstration of solidarity, Turkey's Jewish and Christian religious leaders joined the "Democracy and Martyrs" rally, the government's million-strong anti-coup demonstration in Istanbul.²⁰ In denouncing the coup plotters, however, three of the government officials who spoke at the rally insulted religious minorities by tarring the plotters as "seeds of Byzantium," "crusaders," and as a "flock of infidels."²¹

The hate speech targeting minority communities at the rally was later echoed in Turkey's pro-government media, as part of an alarming trend to connect the coup plot to religious minorities. A pro-government journalist insisted two days after the abortive coup that Fethullah Gülen—a U.S.-based Sunni cleric who is widely considered by the Turkish public to be the coup's mastermind—had a Jewish mother and an Armenian father, and is a member of the Catholic clerical hierarchy.^{22, 23} Another pro-government daily even published a fabricated Vatican passport to show that Gülen is a Catholic cardinal.²⁴ The Greek Orthodox ecu-

menical patriarch was slandered for “plotting” the coup with the CIA, while another pro-government columnist claimed that the plotters might be hiding in churches.^{25,26} Unsurprisingly, it was not long before incitement led to physical attacks against religious minorities.

Churches in Malatya and Trabzon—the scenes of lethal attacks against Christians a decade ago—were the first to be targeted.^{27,28} Later, an Armenian high school in Istanbul was vandalized.²⁹ An Alevi worship hall (*cemevi*) there and homes in Malatya were next, while Christian tourists were harassed in Gaziantep.^{30,31}

Attacks against religious minorities have remained at the elevated level reached shortly after the failed coup. On March 6, 2018, a lone gunman fired a shot through the window of the Saint Maria Catholic Church in Trabzon, a city on Turkey’s Black Sea coast.³² This was the fifth confirmed attack against the church since the assassination of its priest Andrea Santoro in 2006.³³ Saint Maria was one of the churches targeted in the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt, as mobs attacked its gates with hammers and broke its windows.³⁴

In February 2018, an incendiary device damaged Saint Maria’s front door a day ahead of the anniversary of Father Santoro’s assassination.³⁵ Bishop Paolo Bizzeti, who assumed office as the vicar apostolic of Anatolia in 2015—a seat vacant since the murder of his predecessor Bishop Luigi Padovese in 2010—referred to the arson attempt as “one of the many episodes of intimidation and vandalism that affect the Trabzon church every week.”^{36,37,38} Bizzeti complained about assailants who regularly damage the gates and desecrate the church grounds with trash.³⁹ When Trabzon’s local media published the bishop’s concerns, the governor’s office denied that there were weekly attacks and claimed that authorities had been taking necessary precautions.⁴⁰

State-Sanctioned Incitement on Television

SINCE THE ABORTIVE COUP, REVISIONIST HISTORICAL DRAMAS DISSEMINATING anti-minority conspiracy theories—funded by or broadcasted on state-run or pro-government outlets—have become the most effective form of propaganda. Studies show that Turkish citizens on average watch four hours of television every day, and two thirds of this time is spent watching TV series, many of which

glorify the Ottoman past and indoctrinate viewers with neo-Ottoman and pan-Islamist ideology.⁴¹

What is most alarming is the role of Turkey's state-run media outlets in smearing and scapegoating religious minorities, using state funds for incitement, particularly against Jews and Christians. The most notorious example is *Payitaht Abdülhamid* [*The Last Emperor*], a historical drama funded and broadcasted by Turkey's state-run Turkish Radio Television, TRT. It is a blatantly anti-Semitic and anti-Christian series.⁴²

The villains in *The Last Emperor* bear a keen resemblance to all of the Turkish government's bogeymen, religious or otherwise. In the show, Jewish conspiracies often meld together with those of Britain and other European powers, the Catholic Church, socialists, Young Turks, and Freemasons. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself often refers to such a grand conspiracy, overseen by a nebulous puppet-master he calls "the Mastermind." In turn, "Mastermind" was the name of a documentary aired on a leading pro-government news channel, which, among other insights, "revealed" that Jews have dominated the world for the past 3,500 years.⁴³

Meanwhile, each episode of *The Last Emperor* has led to an upsurge in hate speech and incitement online. One Twitter user, after watching this state-funded drama, vowed to turn the territory between the Euphrates and Nile rivers into Jewish graveyards.⁴⁴ Another Twitter user said, "The more I watch *The Last Emperor*, the more my enmity to Jews increases. You infidels, you filthy creatures."⁴⁵

Incitement Through the Courts

SINCE THE ABORTIVE COUP, TURKEY'S COURTS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM have taken a leading role in smearing and scapegoating minorities. This is best illustrated by the farcical case against U.S. Pastor Andrew Brunson. For over 20 years before his sudden detention in 2016, Pastor Brunson, a Presbyterian minister from North Carolina, had preached peacefully in Turkey's third-largest city, Izmir.

Following the attempted coup in July 2016, Turkish authorities initially charged Pastor Brunson with membership in an armed terrorist organization.⁴⁶ Later, they added charges of espionage and attempting to overthrow the government, although there was no evidence to support any of these accusations.⁴⁷

However, under Turkey's draconian state of emergency, he could have faced up to seven years of pretrial detention, and, if convicted, served a life sentence.^{48,49}

Brunson's attorneys were only able to receive the indictment 17 months into his arrest, in March 2018, and then only after it had been first leaked to the media.⁵⁰ The 62-page indictment is a muddled collection of conspiracy theories based largely on ludicrous accusations from three "secret witnesses."⁵¹ In October 2018, a Turkish court convicted Brunson of aiding terrorism but sentenced him only to time served, allowing him to leave the country.⁵²

Until his arrest, Pastor Brunson was a well-respected member of his community and did not quit his post even after surviving a far-right militant's armed attack in 2011.⁵³ When Turkey's religious minorities, particularly Christians and Jews, became scapegoats following the abortive coup in July 2016, Brunson, like many other church leaders, came under increasing pressure.

Turkey's pro-government media was shameless in its smear campaign against Pastor Brunson. The media claimed that the pastor would have become the next director of the CIA had he been successful in helping to coordinate the attempted coup against Erdoğan.⁵⁴

When there was a bomb attack against wardens of the maximum-security prison where Pastor Brunson was being held, a story accusing the CIA of masterminding the attack ran under the headline "The Pastor's Bomb."⁵⁵

Such smear campaigns also have had a detrimental effect on the Christian community at large. In its *2018 Human Rights Violations Report*, Turkey's Association of Protestant Churches stated that during Brunson's case "many churches and individual Christians were made targets," and "[a]s a result of this case a climate of insecurity has reigned in the small Protestant community."⁵⁶

The conspiracy theories in the Brunson indictment also included outrageous accusations against volunteers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including allegations that "English teachers at Turkey's military high schools have been members of the LDS church since the 1990s," and that they all have the same identifying feature: a missing finger! The indictment's targeting of the LDS Church put their volunteers in Turkey at risk, leading to the decision to reassign all of them to other countries, "due to a prolonged period of heightened political tension in Turkey."⁵⁷

In addition to helping propagate a conspiracy theory that the U.S., and more specifically Christians, were responsible for the 2016 coup attempt, the Turkish government's targeting of Pastor Brunson was also aimed at extracting concessions from Washington. Following the coup, Erdoğan launched a campaign of hostage diplomacy, emulating Iran's tactic of holding Western nationals captive.⁵⁸ Turkish

authorities have arrested on dubious charges not only U.S. citizens and consular staff, but also British, Czech, Dutch, French, German, Greek, and Swedish nationals, including journalists, academics, human rights activists, and a Christian pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem.⁵⁹

In September 2017, shortly after issuing an emergency decree giving himself the authority to trade foreign nationals held in Turkish prisons for individuals incarcerated abroad, the Turkish president publicly offered to release the pastor, proposing a prisoner exchange with the United States that would involve the extradition of Fethullah Gülen.^{60,61}

This offer, however, was a red herring. Gülen was one of Erdoğan's closest allies for more than a decade after the Turkish president's rise to power in 2002.⁶² Had the U.S. extradited Gülen, and if he then had appeared before a court of law in Turkey, his testimony could have revealed embarrassing details of their partnership,⁶³ thereby hurting Erdoğan at the ballot box.

When Erdoğan made this swap offer in September 2017, he was actually aiming for an exchange that involved Reza Zarrab, the Turkish-Iranian gold trader who was scheduled to stand trial in New York in November for evading sanctions against Iran.⁶⁴ The Turkish president wanted to prevent Zarrab from revealing information to U.S. authorities that might implicate his own role in sanctions, evasion and corruption.^{65,66}

Zarrab's attorneys confirmed swap rumors by stating to the judge that they had been looking for a "diplomatic solution," a euphemism for a trade that would release a sanctions-busting suspect in exchange for an innocent hostage.^{67,68} Pastor Brunson's case illustrates clearly how religious minorities have become scapegoats, exploited to cover up embarrassing developments at home and abroad, as well as pawns to be used as leverage in bilateral relations.

Erdoğan and the Turkish courts have also cooperated in propagating anti-Semitic conspiracies. On November 21, 2018, Erdoğan told a meeting of local elected officials that "the famous Hungarian Jew Soros" was a force behind Osman Kavala, Turkey's leading philanthropist and civic activist, who, Erdoğan claimed, had "financed terrorists" during the nationwide anti-government protests of 2013.⁶⁹ He added that George Soros is "a man who assigns people to divide nations and shatter them. He has so much money and he spends it this way."

Turkish authorities detained Kavala on October 18, 2017 and held him without an indictment for 478 days, denying him bail 19 times without the prosecutors questioning him even once. Similar to the Brunson's case, Kavala's attorneys first learned about the 657-page indictment against him from pro-government outlets. The Turkish president and prosecutors accuse Kavala of masterminding the

Gezi Park protests of 2013, as well as the abortive coup of 2016, demanding that he be sentenced to life in prison.⁷⁰

Erdoğan's anti-Semitic conspiracy theories linking the countrywide protests of 2013 to a Jewish plot concocted by Kavala, Soros, and his Open Society Foundations (OSF) prompted the foundation's November 2018 decision to leave Turkey.⁷¹ Reacting to the OSF's announcement, a pro-government daily echoed Erdoğan's anti-Semitic rants: "The Open Society Foundation of Jewish speculator George Soros, who is an aide of the great devil the United States and Zionist Israel, fled Turkey."^{72,73}

Spectacles of Benevolence and Tolerance

AMID SYSTEMATIC SMEARING, SCAPEGOATING, AND TARGETING OF TURKEY'S MINORITIES, the Erdoğan government has also choreographed spectacles of benevolence and tolerance toward those same minorities, intending to polish its tarnished image at home and abroad. In 2009, then-Prime Minister Erdoğan held a meeting with religious minority leaders in Turkey, promising reforms and pledging to embrace them with "respect and love."⁷⁴ Turkey's former Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, in an op-ed he later penned for *Project Syndicate*, argued that "after decades of official neglect and mistrust," Erdoğan's listening to religious minority leaders' "problems and concerns" was "a clear signal of his government's intent to buttress their sense of civil inclusion."⁷⁵

Erdoğan has continued to choreograph spectacles of tolerance, even while his government started propagating anti-minority conspiracies following the 2016 failed coup attempt. On January 7, 2018, Erdoğan unveiled Istanbul's Bulgarian Orthodox Sveti Stefan Church, after a seven-year restoration project, together with the Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, only a week after Bulgaria had assumed the six-month rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union.⁷⁶ Although Erdoğan stated during the ceremony that "it is the responsibility of the state to ensure everyone can worship freely," Turkey's state-run media noted that "the church had been restored under so-called rules of reciprocity" in exchange for Sofia's green light for the restoration of the mosque in Bulgaria's second-largest city, Plovdiv.⁷⁷

Erdoğan's meticulously-planned spectacle was aimed at winning the good

graces of the European Union's rotating president, Bulgaria. At the same time, Erdoğan was bolstering his own international image as a patron of minorities abroad, while also proving to his followers that he could defend the rights of Muslims in former Ottoman territories by astutely extracting concessions from Western Christian powers.

The Turkish government has also put a similar plan to use through Turkey's Syriac Christian minority. When Erdoğan announced his plans for a cross-border operation in northeastern Syria, both the Syriac Military Council and the Syriac Union Party issued statements in December 2018 that this could lead to the destruction of their communities. In the U.S. analysts raised concerns that the proposed American pullout—and the subsequent arrival of Turkey's Islamist proxies—could endanger minorities, including Syriac Christians and Yazidis in the region.^{78,79,80}

Shortly after these discussions, the Turkish government announced its decision to issue the first permit in the history of the Republic of Turkey to build a new church. Coincidentally, it was a Syriac Christian church, a project that had been stalled since 2013.⁸¹ The demonstration of benevolence toward Syriac Christians at home, however belated, was an attempt to disavow fears that Turkey and its proxies would pose a threat to Syriac Christians in Syria. Journalists who scrutinized the project more closely, however, discovered that the plot of ground in Istanbul, which the Turkish authorities had allocated for the Syriac church was a Catholic cemetery that had earlier been seized by the state. The conflict that the project triggered between Catholic and Syriac communities was only resolved through the intervention of Pope Francis.⁸²

Although anti-Semitism in Turkey has spiked under the Erdoğan government's rule, fueled by systematic propaganda in Turkey's state-run and pro-government press, Erdoğan has made sure to include meetings with Jewish leaders during his trips abroad, including Washington and London.^{83,84}

The Washington meeting in April 2016 led to a *Haaretz* contributor questioning Erdoğan's motives by asking, "Is Erdogan trying to co-opt U.S. Jewish leaders to launder his reputation?"⁸⁵ As for the London meeting in May 2018, Turkey's pro-government media announced it with the headline, "Anti-Zionist Jewish group condemns Israel in meeting with Erdoğan in London," thus using it as an opportunity to advance the Turkish president's Islamist talking points.⁸⁶

Modalities of Erdoğan's Minority Policy

THE ERDOĞAN GOVERNMENT'S FOUR MODALITIES IN IMPLEMENTING POLICIES vis-à-vis minorities—ranging from scapegoating and incitement to performing acts of benevolence and tolerance—aim to shape public opinion and strengthen majoritarian and sectarian hegemony at home, while also pursuing foreign policy goals. These modalities will continue to shape the status of minorities as the Turkish president looks for ways to extend his rule, which is already into its sixteenth year.

Erdoğan's key strategy since the 2016 abortive coup has been to strengthen his alliance with the ultranationalist MHP. The ongoing Islamist-ultranationalist partnership has not only resulted in a hardline approach to the Kurdish question both at home and abroad, but also the scapegoating and smearing of Turkey's religious minorities. The loss of Turkey's European Union membership prospects, which was the main driver of democratic reforms in the early 2000s, has further exacerbated the rise of authoritarianism and chauvinism in domestic politics.

Given the ongoing downturn in the Turkish economy, and the failure of the Islamist-ultranationalist alliance to deliver in domestic and foreign policy, it is likely that Erdoğan's ruling bloc will double down on its efforts to scapegoat minorities. This will represent an attempt to divert the electorate's attention away from the government's mismanagement and corruption, and will also further worsen the precarious conditions of Turkey's ethnic and religious minorities.

Turkey's minorities' best hope, at this point, would be to avoid becoming scapegoats of Erdoğan's wrath, and to receive his benevolence as his loyal subjects.

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Conflicting Currents in Egyptian Thought

By Tarek Elgawhary

TWO SIGNIFICANT STREAMS OF MUSLIM THOUGHT FLOW THROUGH Egypt. One emanates from the scholarship of the al-Azhar establishment in Cairo; the other from the legacy of Hasan al-Banna and the movement he founded.¹ With that in mind, this article addresses two topics: the role of al-Azhar in the formation of orthodox Sunni Islam in contemporary Egypt, and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and the transnational Islamism movement it inspires. Both of these have emerged as competing voices within Muslim orthodoxy. It is my opinion that until now, these two subjects have been improperly defined and articulated, leading to confusion and ambiguity. Thus, it is necessary to address them both with a dose of history and context along the way. I hope the reader will allow me these detours.

I will argue that the Muslim Brotherhood, as a catalyst to transnational Islamism, has been a competitive and antagonizing voice to that of the *ulama*—i.e. those scholars affiliated with the institution of al-Azhar. Recognizing this tension, which has lasted nearly 100 years, is essential to understanding the current crises within Islam and the global threat of extremism. Therefore, while Egypt provides the primary backdrop for my arguments, it should be viewed as an example for similar patterns in other Muslim-majority countries.

It is also important to state from the beginning that I do not claim that supporting the *ulama* offers the only solution to extremism. The problem of extremism is too large for that; it is a multifaceted, multilayered problem. I personally believe

it has more to do with economics than theological rhetoric. However, based on my experience in helping train hundreds of people in terrorism prevention programs—individuals who are actually standing and fighting on the front lines against Boko Haram, al-Shabab, and ISIS—it is clear that alongside economic issues, there is indeed a theological/religious aspect to the problem. And since I am convinced that this has not been properly and thoroughly addressed by those who have the capability to respond, I offer this paper as a small contribution towards clarification.

The Importance of Islam in Egypt

EGYPT'S MODERNIZATION PROCESS HAS INTRIGUED SCHOLARS FOR NEARLY A century. It has been hailed as a profound example of modernization and liberalization, which developed one of the most influential Muslim-majority contemporary nations, as well as one of the earliest to break away from Ottoman control.² Whether the discussion surrounds political theory, economics, religion, or education, the story of Egypt is often presented as a dialectic that has progressed from chaos to order, and from old to new.

Yet that simplistic dichotomy is misleading, as it neglects the significant role traditional Islamic networks have played in the development of the socio-religious dynamics of Egyptian society. In discussing Egyptian politics prior to the 2011 revolution, in his book *Egypt After Mubarak*, Bruce Rutherford argues that there are two vying forces—the nationalist liberal movement (secular), and the Islamic-liberal movement (Muslim Brotherhood)—that struggled to create a better and more transparent government.³ He offers the usual story of liberals bringing the “light” of liberalism to the *ancien régime* of Islamic institutions, while the Muslim Brotherhood appears as the primary opposition, holding a monopoly on *the* Islamic position. The failure to give credence to the role other religious and non-Islamist actors have played in Egyptian society is a mistake, diminishing their potential potency in solving the modern crisis of radical Islamism.

An alternative reading of events in Egypt, and one that I argue is more accurate, is the interpretation of Islam offered by al-Azhar, whose scholars were able to adapt, more or less, to the changes of the modern world and the rise of today's nation-state. The institution has authored hundreds of works reconciling Islamic law with issues of capitalism, materialism, gender, citizenship, nano technology,

nuclear armament, and more. This ongoing intellectual footprint of al-Azhar is crucial to understanding how Islam continues to play a defining role in the contemporary Egyptian state.

While the conflation of real Islamic scholarship (i.e. the intellectual output of the scholars of al-Azhar) with political operatives using Islamic slogans (the Muslim Brotherhood and their ilk) is not new, the Arab Spring has brought to light the sharp distinction between the ulama and Islamists.⁴ Since the modernization of Egypt, beginning with the Napoleonic invasion in 1798, al-Azhar clerics have been at the forefront in shaping the modern Islamic nation-state. From establishing civil society organizations, to helping draft present-day legal codes, the ulama continually sought to define a relevant Islam in light of intense state-led modernization.

Although not always a comfortable fit, al-Azhar as an institution has helped Egypt's political leaders step into today's world while holding on to their Sunni-Islamic identity. In fact, Egypt's Grand Mufti, Muhammad Bakhit al-Muti'i (d.1936), one of two ulama to serve on the 1923 constitutional committee that drafted Egypt's first constitution, was personally responsible for adding the clause that Islam would be the religion of the nation. This clause has found its way into nearly every constitution of modern Muslim nations.⁵

However, in Sunni Islam, the role of trained religious scholars has been to support and empower political leaders in order to maintain political stability, but not to engage directly in partisan politics. This disposition is commonly referred to as "quietism" and stems from the traditional orthodox view of statecraft. It is perhaps best articulated in the works of *al-siyasa al-shar'yya*, penned by the 11th century theologian and jurist Imam al-Juwayni (d. 1058) in his popular work, *al-Ghiyathi*.

Often misconstrued as an apolitical stance, this view insists that organized political rule is better than civil strife (a sentiment taken directly from the Quran 2:191), and that without a strong civil society any nation-state will collapse.⁶ This attitude has been the hallmark of the Sunni disposition towards statecraft, and it explains why Sunni institutions traditionally focus on the social and spiritual needs of people rather than the pursuit of political power.

While Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood seek a more revolutionary approach to change in society, the ulama argue that the injection of religion into partisan politics is dangerous and counterproductive for maintaining the sanctity of Islamic jurisprudence and the political processes. They believe they can build long lasting change by working at the grassroots level, rather than rallying people to support political parties in the name of religion.

From this point of view, the mixing of religion and partisan politics would provide a religious sanction to particular candidates and political platforms, which,

the ulama argue, is the most grotesque misuse of their religious authority. Instead, in the view of the ulama, political order and a functioning government are necessary for an Islamic society, and this represents the only form of politics they are comfortable with. They believe their role is to help guide people to form the building blocks necessary for a socially responsible and civically minded society, upon which politicians can govern effectively.

As a result of this disposition, it is common in Egypt to find traditional ulama—in particular the hundreds of registered Sufi Orders—at the forefront of water conservation projects, interfaith efforts, anti-female genital mutilation campaigns, health clinics, and other development-oriented projects. These types of efforts, led by the ulama, have had a lengthier and more positive impact on building the social fabric of Egypt’s civil society than the political efforts of Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamism

ISLAMISTS HAVE CHALLENGED THE QUIETIST APPROACH SINCE THE TURN OF THE 20th century, and their growth is important vis-à-vis the evolution of Islam in the modern Egyptian State. While not a cohesive group, Egypt’s Islamists have their origins in the Muslim Brotherhood, and collectively represent a reaction to both colonialism and the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1922.

The Islamists’ approach to politics reflects a continuous dissatisfaction with political structures, claiming that they are either not Islamic enough, or not Islamic at all. This, in their view, justifies in some cases the use of violence to restore the primacy of their extreme interpretation of God’s law.

Although an unorganized group, Islamists have repeatedly denied the work of religious scholars in the codification of Egypt’s laws and in the drafting Egypt’s constitution. This negative response is intended to maintain the narrative that the Egyptian government is not “Islamic,” an issue that supposedly must be rectified through social engineering and periods of violent insurrection.

As a corollary, some radical Islamists have more broadly used this line of thinking to justify the use of violence against anyone who does not share their beliefs. This has resulted in the targeting of such minority groups as Coptic Christian communities⁷ and Sufi networks.⁸ In Egypt, and in other states in which Islamists

came to power during the Arab Spring, violence against such communities increased at an alarming rate.⁹ In contrast, the ulama have championed interfaith initiatives and called for the preservation of diverse cultural traditions.¹⁰

Perhaps a little history and context would be helpful in order to properly place this aberrancy within Islamic thought. Hasan al-Banna (d.1949) established the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 with the intention of filling the many societal gaps created by the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate.¹¹ While originally focused on providing social welfare and championing issues affecting the lower middle class, the Muslim Brotherhood quickly spread its activities to politics, where they gained large-scale support as a populist alternative to the Egyptian State.

By the 1940s, however, the State began to clamp down on the party's activities, particularly after the armed wing of the Brotherhood (known as the "secret apparatus" or *al-jihaz al-khass*), was held responsible for a number of violent incidents, including the assassination of the Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Al-Nuqrashi on December 28, 1948.

The movement went underground in the 1950s, but continued to gain adherents under the influence of Sayyid Qutb (d.1966). Qutb's 1964 manifesto *Milestones*, as well as his commentary on the Quran (*In the Shade of the Quran*), continue to provide the intellectual and theological underpinnings for many radical Islamist groups, including ISIL, al-Qaeda and Hamas.

This last point is an important one to make, and one I believe is not made often enough. There is hardly a radical Islamist movement that does not rely in some form on the writings and theological positions of Qutb.¹² Gilles Kepel, in his 1984 book, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, argued that Qutb's writings, particularly *Milestones*, "[are] the total road to the ideology of the Islamist movement of the seventies."¹³ This same pattern is observed more recently, as Thomas Hegghammer argues, "It is not at all clear how operational the salafi-*ikhwani* dichotomy is in the world of contemporary militant Islamism. Sayyid Qutb is still being cited by groups as Jihadi-Salafi."¹⁴

Although it is true that the post-Qutb Muslim Brotherhood had difficulty accepting his opinions without revision, Qutb continues to represent a major intellectual and theological link between the Muslim Brotherhood and more violent and extremist groups.¹⁵

While the Muslim Brotherhood does not outwardly endorse terrorism, given the government's continual crackdown on their activities, they have adopted several ambiguous positions about justifying the use of violence to achieve political change. This has created an opening for violence that the movement has not been able to temper:

[The Muslim Brotherhood] attempts to justify any violent actions that do not involve killing, but it represents a slippery slope at best and has understandably resulted in serious, damaging organizational rifts and strategic dissonance. The effect is that the Muslim Brotherhood, which previously stood as the model—and drew its strength from—unquestioning loyalty and strict hierarchical discipline, finds itself increasingly marginalized as its established leadership loses control of a violent, rowdy new generation of so-called revolutionary Brothers cooperating with like-minded Islamist actors.¹⁶

When we look at the formation and rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, we see that it has had a tremendous impact on the way we presently discuss Islam and politics in Egypt and other Muslim-majority countries. First, it introduced a new “Islamic” voice into political commentary. Up until the 1920s the ulama, represented largely by graduates of the al-Azhar seminary, spoke almost exclusively as the “Voice of Islam.” Even when secular scholars were inclined to comment on Islamic topics, they usually aligned themselves with a Muslim scholar to strengthen their case.¹⁷

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood provided a new way to comment on Islamic principles without requiring religious scholarship, or needing to fit within the mainstream religious milieu. This opening allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to create a new socio-political discourse about the role of Islam and the state.¹⁸ No longer was the call for reform and modernization coming from al-Azhar scholars like Rifa‘a Tahtawi (d. 1873) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905). Instead, an alternative voice was now gaining popularity.

Another way that Muslim Brotherhood impacted the discussion of Islam and politics in Egypt was introduced through their commentary on Egypt’s legal reforms. Al-Banna rejected the Western model of secular, democratic government and advocated for Islamizing the state through the promotion of his version of a “pure” Islamic law, values, and morals.¹⁹ This stemmed from al-Banna’s belief that Islam must play both a private and public role (termed by al-Banna: *din wa dawla*) in the Egyptian state.²⁰

A similar theme, expounded upon and later exaggerated by Qutb, was the idea that current Muslim nations, including Egypt, had in fact removed themselves from the folds of the faith altogether, and this communal apostasy—what Qutb called the *jahiliyya* of society—required direct action and correction.²¹ In Qutb’s view, as the Brotherhood expanded into politics, their critique of legal reforms was that Egypt’s laws were simply not Islamic enough (and therefore inherently

evil) and must not be based on Western laws and norms. On its own, this notion provided the needed justification to rebel against the state.²² A similar line of argumentation and justification is still advanced by today's Muslim Brothers and radical Salafis.²³

Today, an inaccurate understanding of Egypt's religious landscape is also evident within the academy.²⁴ Ulama, for example, participated in all stages of drafting laws in Egypt and ensured there was no conflict between these laws and the Islamic law, which had existed for centuries.²⁵ Yet, modern scholars fail to include the ulama's perspective on such issues. Instead, they position the Brotherhood and other Islamist actors as the only credible voice of Islam.²⁶ Academically this is a mistake, and one I hope future researchers and writers will carefully avoid. An even bigger problem is the erroneous argument that extremist Muslim groups are in fact "Islamic" because they represent legitimate interpretations of Islam's primary sources.²⁷

However, if one were to take apart piece-by-piece the 15 or 20 major themes Islamist groups use to form their intellectual framework, analyzing the primary sources (i.e. Quranic verses and hadith literature) on which they build their arguments, one would find that their interpretations and use of proof texts are completely heterodox. They are not shared by any legitimate Islamic school of interpretation.²⁸

It is worth noting that Islamists' faulty scholarship has led some Islamic scholars to view these groups as apostates and entirely outside the fold of Islam.²⁹ This remains, however, a separate issue from that of the excommunication of extremist groups from Orthodox Islam.³⁰

In any case, as a result of the often loosely defined discussion of Islam-Muslims-Islamists-Extremists etc., the Muslim Brotherhood and other such groups have gained wide popularity—and in some cases legitimacy—within segments of Western governments. A common argument is that a particular group has renounced violence and thus should be embraced. It is difficult to argue with this, since it is true that, at least publicly, the Muslim Brotherhood claims to have renounced violence. However, this renunciation itself is tactical, not methodological.

The overall goal of these groups—an ideal "Islamic State,"—is one that can be approached by several paths. Some believe in violent insurrection (more along the lines of al-Qaeda and ISIS), while others seek a non-violent approach to political gains.³¹ For this reason, I argue that there is a *spectrum* of extremism, which is critical to understanding the overall discussion of violence and radicalism within the family of Islam.³²

If a group is positioned somewhere on the extremist spectrum, that does not

necessarily mean it will become violent; it does mean that because it is on that spectrum, it is a step away from heterodoxy towards the heresy of violence. Organizations on the left side of the Islamist spectrum may appropriately be thought of as gateway groups, some of which may ultimately slide into violence and extremism. Therefore, the Brotherhood's claims of renunciation of violence, while sounding genuine, should be taken with a grain of salt; in fact they ought to be considered a large warning sign.

Moreover, even the liberal/secular nationalist actors inside Egypt realize that mainstream Islamic institutions hold the key to future political and social stability in Egypt and beyond. For example, the Sufi leader Shaykh Idris al-Idrisi from Aswan was appointed by Egypt's 2015 government to lead reconciliation efforts between Arab tribes in the south of Egypt and in Sinai.³³ Since this appointment, Idrisi has held several high-level tribal meetings and has sought to leverage these tribal relations as a deterrent to violence and extremism in Sinai. According to Idrisi, both the government and the intelligence community are relying on him and other Sufi leaders to help spread a more peaceful and tolerant Islam by using their influence and teachings.

Idrisi has commented that, "the difficulty that has befallen Egypt presents the greatest opportunity for traditional Egyptian Islam."³⁴ In short, the Egyptian government has utilized traditional scholars such as Idrisi because of their authoritative role in society, their capability to mobilize communities, and their ability to reduce conflict through an indigenous peace-building framework. Perhaps these ties between the ulama and the state will be instrumental in fulfilling Egypt's counter-extremism agenda.

Al-Azhar: A Model for Reform

AL-AZHAR IS THE OLDEST, LARGEST, CONTINUOUSLY OPERATING SUNNI SEMINARY in the world, dominating Sunni discourses on an international level. Currently the university provides higher education, while the al-Azhar primary school system offers K-12 studies. At the higher education level, the institution has 64 colleges, over 16,000 faculty members, and nearly 500,000 students.³⁵ Its graduates have gone on to serve as senior government officials, founders of academic centers, influential thought leaders, and even heads of state for a number of Muslim-majority countries.

By some estimates, there are over 9,000 public and private institutions with which al-Azhar has formal partnerships in Egypt alone. Perhaps the strongest public institution with which the university is linked is Dar al-Ifta, the official agency responsible for issuing *fatwas* (non-binding legal opinions), which provides guidance and clarification on contemporary social issues that intersect with the practice of Islam.

Beyond Egypt's borders, al-Azhar maintains a strong international influence in shaping theological discourses in Muslim-majority countries. Its library and digitalized manuscript collections, along with the thousands of dissertations it generates every year, allow al-Azhar to produce more Sunni scholars than any other institution in the world. Aside from the international influence of Saudi Arabia (which, according to the narrative I have expounded on here, would be considered an antagonist), many Muslim countries continually rely on al-Azhar to train their clerics and to authorize their religious leaders. Moreover, over the past 150 years, al-Azhar has demonstrated that it has the ability to think outside the box and push other Sunni institutions internally to adopt more nuanced positions and articulations, keeping in step with the modern world.³⁶

However, despite the size and influence of these institutions, al-Azhar remains a virtually unknown entity. And even among those familiar with al-Azhar's role as a theological seminary, many question its credibility for being a quasi-governmental institution.³⁷ This is perhaps due to the ulama's strict adherence to the traditional Sunni belief of political quietism, which necessitates that religious authorities uphold actions that mitigate the threat of political instability, while avoiding partisan politics. Nonetheless, the institution's tacit support for some of the government's policies, (particularly vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood) have called into question al-Azhar's independence.³⁸

Contrary to this view, and based on my own personal experience dealing with al-Azhar for the past 15 years, it functions with a great deal of independence. In fact, with its unwieldy bureaucracy, al-Azhar is simply too big to be controlled or influenced by an external entity. I do not write this to defend the institution. But I do believe that al-Azhar often self-censors in matters of state, and I hope to make it clear that the notion of direct government oversight of the institution is untrue. It is a common misconception, and the very idea is a fallacy.

Al-Azhar has an extremely antiquated and dilapidated organizational structure, which makes implementation of reforms challenging. And given its large size, goal alignment in and of itself is a problem, simply because there are so many stakeholders involved in the institution. Aside from the position of the "Shaykh al-Azhar," there are several complex layers of authority within the Azhar structure.

And while the upper echelon of al-Azhar leadership is undoubtedly resolute in its commitment to countering radical Islamism, it is not a given that mid-to-lower level administrators automatically share this sentiment. The university has also been slow to reach out to the U.S. and international community simply because it views its primary responsibility as providing Islamic education. Addressing violent extremism, therefore, is a relatively new area of focus for the entity.

There is, however, a larger shortcoming when it comes to the story of al-Azhar, which has called into question its role as a partner. For several decades, students heavily influenced by Wahhabi and Salafi ideologies were permitted to pursue higher education at al-Azhar without first graduating from the institution's grammar or high school.

This policy enabled foreign-funded educational materials (*e.g.* editions of classical texts that were redacted to support radical Islamism) to enter the classrooms.³⁹ This issue has been aggravated by the influence of foreign satellite television stations that propagate extremist ideologies in Egypt, promising economic opportunities to young graduates and activists who observe the Salafi mantra.

Al-Azhar has since changed its policy, and the university no longer accepts students seeking post-secondary education without first being grounded in the institution's traditional Islamic sciences. Nonetheless, the sheer size of al-Azhar makes it difficult to weed out every form of foreign influence. Recent al-Azhar student protests sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood are a case in point.⁴⁰

Where Does This Leave Us?

AS I PROPOSED AT THE BEGINNING, THIS PAPER HAS CONSIDERED AL-AZHAR AND its ulama alongside the Muslim Brotherhood and the groups it has inspired. My intention has been to demonstrate that these two groups are not the same and are, in fact, entirely incompatible.

Unfortunately, in international discussions about Islam in Egypt, or about ways and means of defeating extremism in the name of Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Azhar are conflated at best, or the role of al-Azhar is ignored all together. This confusion leads to both advertent and inadvertent empowering of the Muslim Brotherhood in the context of Egypt. More broadly, no matter how legitimate the two institutions may seem to be, efforts and arguments—even on the grounds of human rights—claiming that Brotherhood-affiliated groups represent legitimate,

dissenting Muslim voices inevitably empower extremist organizations, both directly and indirectly.

On the other hand, empowering the ulama and their institutions (a process itself that will be difficult, but one I feel is necessary), will include preventative measures that can inoculate large populations from extremism for generations to come. This is true for the very reason that, when it has taken place, it has been proven to work.

While the problem may be clear, the solution, unfortunately, is not. One of the reasons I suspect that Western governments have found it easier to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood is that they are organized and have a polished, accessible presence in the West. You can easily find them and speak to them. The ulama are not so available. They are ivory tower academics who often times are confined to the dens of libraries and study circles. I often muse, if only half seriously, that al-Azhar is the living version of Harry Potter's Hogwarts—minus the magic.

This results in the view that al-Azhar is too difficult for the non-expert to deal with, and any efforts to work with it are too often considered a waste of time by government officials. And therein lies the most dangerous mistake in the fight against global extremism: the idea that argument and debate are too difficult. In fact, decades of experience have made it manifestly clear that informed argument is essential to actually making a dent in an expanding global problem.

In this regard, one way to make this seemingly impenetrable issue more workable is to understand precisely what al-Azhar is and what we stand to gain by engaging with it. I previously mentioned the “intellectual footprint” of al-Azhar's ulama. It may be helpful to think of this footprint as raw material. The raw material is pure scholastic discourse, rooted in the finest tools of the Sunni orthodox interpretative methodology (*Usul al-fiqh*). Unfortunately, this material is too unrefined to be usable by non-experts.

In the refining process of raw materials, there is a supply chain in which several levels of activity are necessary: first to farm the raw material, then retrieve it, transport it, process it, market it, and sell it as a desirable consumer item. In these supply chains, no one person is expected to be able to do it all. If we keep this example in mind, it will not surprise us that the ulama of al-Azhar—representing the farming and retrieving side of our example supply chain—are abundantly rich in intellectual material (raw material). But by its very nature, a great deal of effort will be required to convert this raw material into usable packets of information to those unfamiliar with this raw material.

Al-Azhar's scholars do not need help in farming and retrieving—this is what they do best. However, in order to complete the supply chain, engagement with them

is essential to fill in the gaps. In the past assistance was considered as directly empowering the Azhar and its scholars. Recommendations of language training (particularly English), media training, organizational training, etc. were commonly heard. While there is no doubt that all of these are helpful, I offer a slightly nuanced recommendation. There is a need to form, support, and empower “bridge institutions” and “bridge individuals.” In the Western world, and the United States specifically, there are hundreds of individuals who represent the methodology of al-Azhar and themselves have formed their own organizations. What distinguishes these people and organizations is that they are hardwired to manufacture and process the raw material of al-Azhar into a product that people in the West can understand. This is what they can do best, and thus complete the supply chain. While this might seem difficult at first, I believe that it is not only doable, but necessary.

NOTES

1. The “Azhar Establishment” is a broader concept than simply the Azhar University as it is often referred to. The “establishment” or “institution” as I refer to it below represents the following: all Azhar schools (primary through graduate studies), the Ministry of Religious Endowments (*Awqaf*), that National Fatwa Office (*Dār al-Iftā’ al-Misriyya*), the office of the Grand Imam (*Mashyakhāt al-Azhar*), as well as thousands of independent scholars who have studied with Azhar scholars and run their own educational institutions around the world.
2. Rutherford, Bruce, *Egypt After Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), on and around page 30. At its core, this argument and those of the scholars Rutherford uses as background material for Egypt, argue the narrative of the “triumph” of liberalism, the “defeat” of Islam, and the resulting secular (read un-religious) nature of both law and government.
3. *Ibid.*
4. It should be clear that both groups are not monolithic by any means and one could argue that their perimeters are porous. However, for purposes of this paper I am drawing on generalities that can be determined from the base of the respective groups. In the case of Egypt, this sort of dichotomy is aided by the presence of the both al-Azhar, a large institution, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood and its one-time affiliated political party. The rise of the Arab Spring, and particularly its repercussions in Egypt, have moved al-Azhar to the side of the State, and moved the Muslim Brotherhood and those sympathetic to it in the opposite direction.
5. Usama al-Sayyid Mahmud al-Azhari, *Asanid al-Misriyyin* (Abu Dhabi, Dar al-Faqih, 2011), 361.
6. For a good summary of the Sunni view of statecraft see: Wael Hallaq, *Shari’a: Theory, Practice,*

- Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Parts I & II; Frank E. Vogel, *Islamic Law and Legal System* (Brill: Leiden, 2000).
7. "Coptic Churches Burn in Egypt," *Al-Jazeera*, August 14, 2013, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201308142224-0022979>.
 8. Irfan al-Alawi, "Egyptian Extremism Sees Salafis Attacking Sufi Mosques," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/apr/11/salafis-attack-sufi-mosques>.
 9. Peter Beaumont and Patrick Kingsley, "Violent Tide of Salafism threatens the Arab Spring," *The Guardian*, February 9, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/09/violent-salafists-threaten-arab-spring-democracies>.
 10. Magdy Aziz Tobia, "Meet the Egyptians Fighting Interfaith Tensions," *Common Ground News Service*, December 4, 2012, <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=32409&lan=en&sp=0>.
 11. Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). For the original writings of Hasan al-Banna see: Hasan al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid Hasan al-Banna* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1965). A more recent work that discusses the Brotherhood in Egypt is Khalil al-Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
 12. In his very short biography of ISIL's former number two-in-command, Muhammad Adnani, al-Bin'ali says that Qutb's Quranic commentary *In the Shade of the Quran* was one of the most read books by Adnani while in prison and largely responsible for his theology. See Abu Sufyan Turki Bin Mubrak Bin'ali, *al-Lafz al-Sani fi Tarjamat al-'Adnani* (ISIL publication), 3.
 13. Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984), p. 38.
 14. Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi Salafis or Revolutionaries: On Religion and Politics in the Study of Islamist Militancy," in R Meijer (ed), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, (London/New York: Hurst/Columbia University Press, 2009), 254.
 15. Kepel, 60-66. Also see Yusuf Qaradawi's autobiography, particularly volume 2, where he dedicates dozens of pages to critiquing Sayyid Qutb. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Ibn al-Qarya wa'l Kuttub*, 4 vols., (Dar al-Shuruq, 2004).
 16. Mokhtar Awad and Mostafa Hashem, "Egypt's Escalating Islamist Insurgency," *CEIP*, October 2015, page 7, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_58_Egypt_Awad_Hashem_final.pdf.
 17. One famous example of this is Qasim Amin's close alignment to Muhammad 'Abduh in thought and in writing. While Amin is hailed as one of the greatest Egyptian thinkers to advocate for the reform of laws related to women, it was Muhammad 'Abduh who provided and even wrote large sections of Amin's writings. See: 'Amāra, Muhammad ed., *al-'Amal al-Kamila li'l Imam Muhammad 'Abduh*, 5 vols., (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993), 1:264-265.

18. This ultimately led to their platform “Islam is the Solution,” calling for everything to be “based on the Qur’an and Sunna,” requiring all laws to be founded in Islamic original source material.
19. This supposedly “pure” form of Islam is commonly referred to as Salafism. It was in these early years that the Brotherhood socio-political philosophy was connected to the theological doctrines of Salafism. However, while this is usually the argument, a closer look will show that al-Banna was more influenced by Sufism and Sufi organizational structures, which provided the framework for his social vehicles. The Muslim Brotherhood after al-Banna was, however, more inclined to Salafism.
20. These principles can be found in al-Banna’s writings: Bannā, *Majmu‘at Rasa’il*, Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. In fact, Muhammad Adnani articulates a Qutbian rejection of all Muslim countries’ sovereignty because he claimed that none of them followed the Sharia. See Bin‘ali, 12.
23. Mokhtar Awad and Mostafa Hashem, “Egypt’s Escalating Islamist Insurgency.”
24. Rutherford, Bruce, *Egypt After Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), page 30.
25. Elgawhary, Tarek, “Restructuring Islamic Law: The Opinions of the ‘Ulama’ Towards Codification of Personal Status Law in Egypt” (PhD diss, Princeton University, 2014).
26. Farahat Ziadeh, *Lawyers, the Rule of Law, and Liberalism in Modern Egypt*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1968), 135-147. In Farahat Ziadeh’s treatment of Egypt’s legal reform, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood opinions are posited as the Islamic voice of conservatism in opposition to legal reform and modernization in general and the codification of personal status law specifically.
27. See for example:
<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>, particularly the comments of Bernard Haykel, and
<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/03/24-isis-approach-to-islamic-scripture-part-one-bunzel?cid=00900015020089101US0001-03241>.
28. A good book in English that discusses these major themes is Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, (Oxford University Press: New York City, 2016), and one in Arabic is Usama al-Azhari, *al-Haqq al-Mubin fi’l Radd ‘ala man Tala‘ub bi’l Din* (Dār al-Faqih: Abu Dhabi, 2015).
29. A notable contemporary example is Muhammad Yaqubi, *Refuting ISIS* (Sacred Knowledge: Herndon, VA, 2016).
30. In my working framework on preventing violence and extremism I state the following:
“I deem extremists to be ‘Muslim,’ albeit in grave moral error, and do not subscribe to the perspective that they are outside of the folds of Islam. This last point is in no way an attempt to lessen the seriousness of extremism, but rather an opportunity to link extremist groups to the larger intra-Islamic phenomena of kharijism, which can provide Muslims with great insight and precedent in dealing

with this specific problem,”<https://coexistresearch.com/framework-understanding-violence-extremism-within-family-islam/>.

31. These different approaches are covered well in: Thomas Hegghammer, “The Ideological Hybridization of Jihadi Groups,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 9 (2009), https://www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1179/20100108_ct9forposting.pdf.
32. A skeleton of this argument can be found here: <https://coexistresearch.com/framework-understanding-violence-extremism-within-family-islam/> and I hope to have the opportunity to expand on this in the near future.
33. <http://www.vetogate.com/1200453>.
34. In conversation with the author, summer of 2016. For the impact Sufism is having amongst millennials in Egypt see: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/07/egyptian-millennials-turn-to-sufism.html>.
35. According to the Egyptian Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics: <http://www.capmas.gov.eg>.
36. Over the last century and a half, Al-Azhar has tackled difficult issues such as voting rights, democracy, citizenship, modern banking transactions, and FGM. While these issues seemed “dealt with” at the time of their appearance and discussion, this was not the case.
37. In 1961, the state implemented several reforms expanding its authority over Al-Azhar, empowering the president to appoint the head of Al-Azhar, and bringing all clerics on the government’s payroll.
38. Jon Alterman, “Al-Azhar’s Perilous Resurgence,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 2015.
39. Works of the mid to late 19th century that spoke out critically of the Wahabi movement like Ahmad al-Sawi’s (d. 1825) Quranic exegesis and Ibn ‘Abidin’s (d. 1836) encyclopedic work in Hanafi positive law, are redacted for publication inside Saudi Arabia. In addition, 19th century works written by Sunni scholars in Arabia speaking out against the violence of the Wahabis, like the treatise of Ahmad Zayn Dahlan (d. 1886) and Sulayman ‘Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1793) who was a brother of Muhammad ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1792), are banned from print inside the Kingdom.
40. “Egypt Police Storm Al-Azhar University to Disperse Student Protest,” *Associated Press*, March 30, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/egypt-police-storm-al-azhar-university-to-disperse-student-protest-1.2592100>.

The Anti-Islamic Movement in China

By Haiyun Ma

THE MASS HUMAN RIGHTS ATROCITIES IN XINJIANG—THE REGION in China’s far west, where Chinese Communist authorities have imprisoned upwards of one million Uyghur Muslims in “political reeducation” camps—are worsening, and this demands a far greater international response. Meantime, Beijing’s sweeping crackdown against the Uyghurs and its modern day gulags have been accompanied by an alarming resurgence in China’s hostility toward religious minorities, and toward Islam and Muslims in particular. The anti-Muslim movement in China can be directly attributed to the ruling Communist Party’s atheism, ideology of Han Chinese supremacism, and “national rejuvenation.” At the same time, contemporary Chinese anti-Muslim sentiments and harsh policies are not simply the byproduct of communism. They can be traced historically to Han Chinese chauvinism, which first appeared during the early Qing Dynasty, when China came to be ruled by an ethnic minority, the Manchus.

Throughout China’s imperial history, the term “Hui” was used at different times to refer to and also to derogate the adherents of monotheistic faiths like Islam, Judaism, and even Christianity. During the Manchu/Qing Dynasty’s (1644–1911) westward territorial expansion into the heart of Eurasia, large numbers of Han Chinese migrated into territories previously dominated by non-Han peoples, including Hui Muslims. This led to ethnic and religious tensions which frequently became violent in the empire’s interior regions and along its frontiers in Central

Asia. It also gave rise to popular anti-Muslim and chauvinistic attitudes among Han Chinese, which included efforts to forcibly assimilate the Hui into Chinese society. It even led to calls to eliminate Muslims and Islam from the empire altogether.

This historical pattern of Han Chinese chauvinism and “Hui-phobia” has continued into the modern era. In recent times, the spread of the Internet and social media in China has contributed to a marked popular resurgence of anti-Muslim sentiment, actions and policies.

This paper explores the evolution of anti-Islamic stereotyping and bigotry in China from the Hui-phobia of the early Qing period to the blatant hostility toward Islam and Muslims nowadays. The first part looks at the 17th Century Ming-Qing transition period and the unique aversion toward the Hui Muslim minority that arose then. The second part of the paper discusses anti-Islamic ideology in contemporary China, and particularly non-official “self media” (or independently operated social media accounts on platforms such as WeChat and Weibo).

In Western societies that have been struggling with Islamist terrorism, “Islamophobia”—the irrational, ideological fear and bigotry toward Islam—is a controversial concept. However, bigotry and hate of Muslims as a whole remains a marginal movement in the West. It is publicly opposed as an offense to basic human decency, and limited in its expression by legal and political institutions.

In Communist China, by contrast, few such institutions and regulations exist. Instead, the state’s brutal policies in Xinjiang, carried out through the Urumqi offices of “eradicating pornography and illegal publication,” have directly endorsed and fomented a popular, China-wide fear of and xenophobic animosity toward Islam and Muslims. As a result, the People’s Republic of China has become the world’s foremost purveyor of anti-Islamic ideology and hate. This, in turn, has translated into broad public support for the Beijing government’s intensifying oppression of Muslims in the Xinjiang region and elsewhere in the country.

“Hui-phobia” in Imperial China

TO UNDERSTAND THE RESURGENCE OF ANTI-ISLAMIC SENTIMENT IN CONTEMPORARY China, it is useful to look at the emergence of Han Chinese chauvinism and related negative stereotypes of Muslims during late Imperial China. A uniquely Han Chinese form of “Hui-phobia” first began to appear in the 17th Century, during the transitional period between the end of the Ming Dynasty and the rise, in 1644, of

the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty. During the Ming era, the Han Chinese-dominated state was generally tolerant of Muslims and protected Islam, which had diverse origins in Chinese history and had established deep roots in China.¹

In the Qing era, however, China came to be dominated by the Manchus, who themselves were a minority people from Inner Asia. The Manchu rulers undertook to extend their imperial control far beyond the former domains of Ming China. Through military conquest and political alliances with other non-Han minorities (including Mongols, Muslims, Tibetans, and others), the Manchu empire-builders established their control over not just the majority Han and Chinese-speaking territories of what historians called “China Proper,” but also over the largely Hui or Muslim areas that traditionally existed to the West of China. During the Qing dynasty, these newly annexed territories in Central Eurasia came to be known in Chinese as “Xinjiang,” or China’s “New Frontier.”

The Han Confucian officials who served the Manchu/Qing state, and who implemented its policy of westward imperial expansion, frequently clashed with the indigenous Muslims and other peoples that they sought to subject to their authority. This gave rise to a new discourse among Han Confucian scholars that was suspicious about Islam and the Hui in particular. In the course of the early Qing’s territorial expansionism and administrative reforms, Han Confucian officials started to equate the dominant Han Chinese majority in Manchu-ruled China as the foremost political and legal subjects (*min*) of the Qing. At the same time, Han Chinese scholars and officials began to denigrate the non-Han subject peoples of the Qing, describing the Hui peoples as “foreigners” and their cultural practices as “heterodox,” while denying them equal legal and political status with the Han Chinese.

In his *Records of Knowledge Gained Day by Day*, the Han Confucian philologist and geographer Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) claimed that the Hui people had first become marginalized (much like today’s Uyghurs) during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Gu criticized the Hui people for forming their own closed communities that were segregated from the majority Han Chinese. He also ridiculed Hui cultural traditions that were different from the Han Chinese, such as the consumption of beef, a practice which was outlawed in agrarian Chinese society.² Gu Yanwu further presented a critique of Islamic rituals and rites, which came to be seen as a threat to the cultural dominance of Han Chinese and the larger imperial order. As a well-known Confucian ideologue during the Ming-Qing transition period, Gu’s criticisms of Hui Muslims had an important influence on Han Chinese stereotyping about Islam and growing misperceptions of the Hui. In subsequent years, Gu’s views became increasingly prominent politically, with important

effects on Han Chinese discourses about Islam and the treatment of Muslims.

Chen Shiguan (1680-1758), the governor of Confucius' home province of Shandong, became a prominent Qing-era critic of Hui Muslims. As a guardian of the Han Confucian order, Chen deemed Islam an "abnormality" and a threat to social harmony. He attacked Qing officials for supporting and tolerating the Hui, and proposed that the Manchu imperial court outlaw Islam and compel Hui officials and religious scholars to renounce their Muslim faith. In his indictment of Islam in 1724, Chen complained the Hui Muslims neither venerated heaven and earth as Confucians did, nor did they offer rituals to gods and ghosts, or follow the orthodox calendar as were the customs of the Han Chinese. Instead, the Hui Muslims segregated themselves from Chinese society on the basis of religion and followed their own calendar.³

Chen moreover complained that the Hui Muslims monopolized the economies of key cities and trading routes in the empire, which he felt should be controlled by Han Chinese. This added an economic dimension to the already existing cultural and ideological grievances frequently raised by Han Confucian imperial officials against Islam.

Building on this, some Han Confucian officials sought to turn their growing Hui-phobia into imperial law. In the northwest frontiers of Xinjiang, and elsewhere in the empire's interior regions where Muslims resided, the commander Yue Zhongqi (1686-1754)—a descendent of the famous Han patriot Yue Fei (1103-1142)—tried to institute legal codes which discriminated against Hui Muslims.⁴ Lu Guohua, a provincial inspector of Anhui, proposed that since Hui Muslims were now common subjects of the prosperous Qing Empire, legal statutes against "luring the population into heterodoxy" and on "violating institutions" should be used to punish Muslim believers, along with any imperial officials who tolerated Islamic practices.⁵ In one of the most ferocious Han Chinese Confucian attacks on Hui Muslims, the xenophobic Wei Shu from Shandong province compared Hui Muslims to the five barbarian tribes which beleaguered the early Jin Dynasty (266-420). He openly advocated for forcefully expelling Muslims from China on the grounds that they—and their religion—were foreign.⁶

This rising Han chauvinism and anti-Islamic sentiment in the early Qing period, and the patterns of Han Chinese abuse it inspired against the Hui, began to lessen as China's Manchu rulers acted to suppress it. Indeed, the Manchus did not endorse the ideological, religious, political, and legal manifestations of Han supremacism, nor did they promote the Hui-phobia spread by many Han Confucian scholars and officials.⁷ Instead, the Manchu rulers adopted a cultural-legal approach to the governance of their various subject populations.

For the Manchus, each subject population in the interior regions of Qing China—regardless of its size, ethnicity, culture, or religion—was to be regarded and treated as equal subjects. The various settled populations in the Qing China’s interior (the “frontiers” in Xinjiang and Tibet were a different matter) were sub-grouped as Han/Chinese-min, Hui/Muslim-min, Miao/Hmong-min, and the Zang/Tibetan-min (who, for the Manchus, were distinct from nomadic Tibetans). On the basis of these population-oriented policies, China’s Manchu rulers attempted to suppress Han supremacism and its related Hui-phobia. Both were deemed threats to the order and harmony of their multi-ethnic empire.

In fact, the Manchu/Qing emperors such as Kangxi (1654-1722), Yongzheng (1678-1735), and Qianlong (1711-1799) consistently condemned Han Hui-phobia. For example, in 1694, during the Kangxi Emperor’s reign, a tablet was erected on Beijing’s Oxen Street that read: “The Han are not on par with Muslims, for Muslims worship the Creator five times a day even without receiving stipend or benefits (from the empire).”⁸ Through this, the emperor praised Muslim piety and fealty to the Manchus, while admonishing Han Confucian officials for their self-importance and maltreatment of Muslims. For the Manchus, the legitimacy of Islam in the heartlands of Qing China should remain unquestionable, and they instructed the Han Chinese to respect Muslims and their customs. In the eyes of the Manchu Court, Muslims were co-equal with Han subjects.

The Manchus subsequently punished Han Chinese officials who expressed xenophobic prejudice and hostility against Muslims. The Yongzheng Emperor, for instance, suspected that Lu Guohua’s Han chauvinism and attacks on Islam were motivated by a desire either for Han Chinese revenge against Muslims, or to create disorder within Qing China—or perhaps both.

The emperor duly ordered Lu’s removal from his position.⁹ The emperor also issued an edict prohibiting discrimination against Muslims, ordering that the routine and regular laws which applied to the Han Chinese should be equally and fairly applied to Hui Muslims.¹⁰

The Qianlong Emperor had even more to say about Han Chinese chauvinism and anti-Hui sentiments. Through his study of Confucian literature from the Ming era (*ming shi*), Qianlong discovered an insulting character referring to Hui Muslims that contained a dog radical (*quan*).¹¹ The emperor publicly criticized the petty Han Confucian officials responsible for this vulgar literary practice, and in 1775 he commanded that this humiliating character be corrected.¹²

The Qianlong Emperor further condemned the “ridiculous comments” of Han Confucian ideologues like Wei Shu, deeming it “absurd and unlawful” to associate Hui Muslims with the five barbarian tribes of the ancient Jin Era.¹³ For the emperor,

Wei Shu's Han supremacism and calls to expel Muslims from Qing China was a serious crime. Wei Shu was sentenced to "death by slicing."¹⁴ This punishment indicated that the Manchu Court considered his brand of Han Chinese supremacism as an affront not just to Hui Muslims, but also tantamount to rebellion against the Manchus, and thus a danger to imperial stability and sovereignty.

The Resurgence of Anti-Muslim Hate in Modern China

WITH THE END OF THE MANCHU EMPIRE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REPUBLIC of China (ROC) in 1912, ethnic and religious politics within China were dramatically transformed. In the new republic, the former subjects of the Qing Empire, including Muslims, were meant to be treated as equal nationals especially under the Beiyang government from 1913 to 1928. With the rise of Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) and Han nationalism in the 1930s, some Han Chinese suspicion of Muslims, along with cultural misconceptions and misrepresentations of Islam resurfaced, often associated with pigs or pork. However, during the nation-building efforts of the 1930s, Chinese political or legal attacks against Muslim nationals were rare. In fact, Muslims actively participated in the Chinese nationalist movement, and many earned prominent political positions in the new republic before it collapsed in 1949.

The creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (and the PRC's subsequent military re-conquest of Xinjiang and Tibet) effectively ended the ROC's treatment of Muslims as equal nationals. Instead, the Chinese Communist regime implemented the Soviet "minority nationalities" (or *minzu*) model throughout the new PRC Empire. Under this paradigm, the PRC's diverse subject peoples were classified into 56 distinct ethnic nationalities, with the largest group by far being Han Chinese.

For China's Communists, the Han Chinese were generally seen as a socially and culturally more advanced "big brother" to the fifty-five other non-Han minority nationalities. Ten of the recognized minority nationalities are officially classified as Muslim, including the Turkic Uyghurs, the ethnic Chinese Hui, and others. These Muslim minorities are located throughout China, but the majority of Turkic Muslims are found in the Uyghur homeland of Xinjiang. Other Hui Muslims are

spread throughout the Western provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Yunnan, Ningxia, and Henan.

Since 1949, the diverse cultures and religions of China have been increasingly subordinated to and incorporated into this PRC framework of minority nationalities. In communist ideology, the different nationality groupings were in principle meant to be equal to one another, although Han Chinese (over 91 percent of the total population) always were, and still remain, the PRC's clearly dominant ethnic group.

During the Mao era, the revolutionary Communist Party committed large-scale violence and repression against all of the PRC's indigenous cultures and traditions, including both Han Chinese and minority traditions. While many Muslims suffered, it would be fair to say that from the 1950s to the 1970s, Islam and Muslims were not singled out as a regime or Han majority target. This was perhaps because China's Confucian Tradition had been wiped out by the communist revolution, and along with it, the minority Confucian tradition of Hui-phobia was suppressed, too. Moreover, at the time, many of the PRC's closest friends, in what was then called the "Third World," were majority Muslim countries.

However, in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the formation of Central Asian Muslim republics, overtly anti-Islamic attitudes started to resurface in China. By the late 1990s, new geopolitical dynamics in Central Asia began to translate into hostile Chinese discourses and policies towards Turkic Muslims, particularly in Xinjiang. Soon the Chinese started to make an explicit link between the Islamic religion and the so-called "three evil forces" of separatism, extremism and terrorism.

In a 2018 analysis that examined 10 years of news reporting in China, journalists Luwei Rose Luqiu and Fan Yang at SUNY-Albany documented how the views of Islam and Muslims in state-controlled Chinese news coverage steadily worsened. In official PRC media, negative stereotyping of Islam became increasingly commonplace. Moreover, the lack of knowledge among Chinese journalists and editors about Islam and Muslims made them reliant on Western news coverage. This coverage, particularly since 9/11, has heavily focused on the rising threat of international Islamist terrorism.¹⁵

The PRC state media published "positive" propaganda about Islam, including stories that focused on how Muslims have benefited from the Communist Party's rule. But that failed to explain the destitute conditions facing Muslim ethnic groups, or the other reasons why the state was providing special benefits to them. As a result, many Han Chinese, particularly in recent years, have tended to regard the Party's policies of preferential treatment toward Muslims as grossly

unnecessary and unfair. This has helped to stoke Han Chinese anger against Muslim ethnic groups.¹⁶

While the Party-state's coverage of Islam in the 1990s and early 2000s was clearly misinformed and politically motivated, it was not especially hostile to Muslims or to Islam as such. This changed in the 2000s thanks to the burgeoning Internet and social media scene in China. Since then, non-official social media has emerged as a major platform for fomenting and spreading accusations about the Muslims and their loyalty to China. In particular, Islam increasingly came to be regarded as a threat to PRC sovereignty and territorial integrity. Han supremacism and outright hostility toward Islam and Muslims has since flourished in particular on two major Chinese social media platforms: since 2009, on the micro-blogging site *Sina Weibo* and since 2011, on the multi-purpose messaging application WeChat (*Weixin*).¹⁷

This surge in anti-Muslim hostility was partly triggered by ethnic rioting and attacks on Party police in Xinjiang in 2009, and a subsequently harsh government crackdown on Uyghurs. But it was also driven by rising levels of grassroots Han Chinese chauvinism both online and off. Wang Jing, who studies anthropology and has conducted field work in China's Hui communities, points out that the development of social media and online anti-Islamic activism in China has combined with other factors—like misinformed and selectively censored state media, and the import of ultra-right ideologies from abroad—to generate a broad-based, popular Han Chinese anti-Muslim movement.¹⁸ Indeed, the spread of social media has increasingly diminished the Party-State's monopoly over broadcasting and propaganda on ethnic and religious issues.

Today, “unofficial” social media not only crowds out official Party media, but it also generates, fabricates, and broadcasts its own coverage of Islam and Muslims. This, to some degree, also influences the Party-State's policy. This is especially true at local levels in the western regions, where officials appear to be unable to distinguish between the Party line on Islam and online hate speech. This may be due to Party officials' ignorance. It could also be the result of the Party's failure to prevent misperceptions about Islam and to limit growing populist anti-Muslim hostility. Simultaneously, provincial officials are increasingly feeling pressure from grassroots Han supremacists and anti-Muslim activists, and are likely fearful of running afoul of their demands.

The spread of anti-Muslim propaganda on Chinese social media is driven by a large and growing network of activists and radicals. These include a retired researcher of Marxism and professed expert on “atheism,” Xi Wuyi; a Ministry of Commerce analyst Mei Xinyu; a self-described Daoist and online retailer, Liang

Xingyang; an unemployed vagrant Hu Cheng (*Weibo* ID: *Fulüfuwei*); and the so-called “Chinese Voice of America” and “Home of North American Chinese,” to name a few. These Chinese “cyber-warriors” against Islam habitually spread rumors and otherwise exaggerate or wholly fabricate news which discredits Muslims, and frightens non-Muslims about the threat posed to PRC by Islam.

Virtually around the clock, hundreds of Chinese *Weibo* users post a steady stream of news stories and opinion articles with an avowedly anti-Muslim bent. For instance, Xi Wuyi alone has posted over 9,244 news, comments, and “selected submissions” about Muslims and Islam on Sina *Weibo*.¹⁹ Among other things, Islam, which is offensively and derogatorily described as the “green religion” (*lu jiao*) or the foreign “green green” (*lu lu*) faith, is attacked as an “evil religion” (*xie jiao*). Likewise, Muslims are described as “Muslim animals” (*mu chu*) who worship a God that is referred to as a “true pig” (*zhen zhu*)²⁰ (which in Chinese phonetically and purposefully replaces God with the homophone of pig.)

In addition to insulting Muslims and their beliefs, online anti-Islam radicals also offer their own version of “news and analysis.” Their reports mock Muslims and depict them as duplicitous and dangerous to society. False rumors abound, for example allegations that consumers of halal food pay a special “religious tax” that goes to ethnic-religious organizations and benefits and strengthens Muslims, or that masses of refugees from Muslim countries are surging toward China, intending to “Islamicize” the entire country. One anti-Muslim nurse from Chengdu Hospital went to the extreme of scattering blood-soaked bits of cotton into a plate of halal noodles, then posting photos of this bizarre concoction online, hoping to stir up panic.²¹

Not surprisingly, this anti-Muslim commentary has become something of a money-maker for some entrepreneurial bloggers and posters.²² Others, however, truly see themselves as faithful Han Chinese “patriots,” struggling against the threat they believe Islam, Muslims, and other minority groups pose to the integrity of PRC and the Party-State’s ideology. Taken together, their anti-Islamic vitriol unmistakably resembles the Hui-phobia of the early Qing period. Some contemporary Han Chinese activists actually share the radical goal of eradicating Islam and Muslims altogether from Chinese society.

This panoply of anti-Islam social media raises a significant question: to what extent is China’s online activism tolerated or even supported by PRC authorities?

Some researchers have concluded that the diverse tactics brandished by on-line activists are not as random or spontaneous as they may appear. The campaign is instead, the handiwork of a carefully coordinated group—which is not opposed by the Party and its legion of censors, and may even be tacitly backed by it. Indeed, a

groundbreaking study has exposed interwoven relationships between various anti-Muslim commentators, indicating that both on- and off-line, many of them remain in regular contact, encouraging and seeking to supplement one another's efforts.²³

Through this coordination, a sort of "division of labor" on social media has strengthened the assault against Islam. Individual posters are backed up by teams of supportive responders, approving and applauding their messages. Meanwhile, well-known anti-Muslim writers are assisted by a clique of followers who repost their articles, contributing to the impression that the original authors have countless constituents and are genuinely influential.

To further amplify the anti-Muslim propaganda to *Weibo* users, popular on-line posters sometimes develop close relationships with those who manage social media. For example, the CEO of *Sina Weibo* (ID: laiquzhijian) has frequently promoted well-known anti-Islam ideologues, sharing their speeches with over four hundred millions followers.²⁴ In other words, China's premier social media platforms and their staff, such as *Sina Weibo*, are directly involved in spreading anti-Muslim propaganda.

At times, the goals of Chinese anti-Muslim advocates do seem to differ with the Party's line and with what PRC officials have to say. In fact, activists appear to be intentionally pressuring Party authorities and institutions to take ever more extreme positions on Islam and against Muslims. In one instance, Xi Wuyi falsely accused the Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu of spending billions of Chinese Yuan to build mosques and other buildings featuring Arab-style architecture.²⁵ And yet, because of governmental cowardice or complicity, no Party official has taken action against these fabricated anti-Muslim stories.

Ostensibly to avoid censure, Chinese cyber-warriors against Islam sometimes attempt to build connections with traditional media, seeking to be quoted as experts on Islamic affairs in such news outlets as the English version of *The Global Times* (*Huanqiu Shibao*).²⁶ This pretense introduces various anti-Muslim agitators to the public, as if they were actually experts. Others create a façade of official recognition by name-dropping, or claiming personal connections—whether true or false—to Party authority figures. For instance, Xi Wuyi's *Weibo* proudly mentions her special relationship with Zhu Weiqun, former head of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of the National Committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference.²⁷ Meanwhile, Mei Xinyu's *Weibo* and WeChat posts frequently proclaim that he has been consulted by the Communist Party on Muslim affairs. Mei uses his apparent proximity to state agencies in order to legitimize the political correctness of his anti-Islamic stance and thereby advance his agenda.

Conceivably, the Party could see such anti-Islamic ideology as useful for

strengthening its power over China, including by promoting its overall program of Han Chinese “national rejuvenation.” But if this is the case, there is a feasible risk that the Party is unleashing forces that it will not be able to control.

Some activists, for instance, have portrayed the Han Chinese majority as being victimized by the PRC’s longstanding preferential treatment of minority nationalities, and they criticize leadership for being purportedly too lenient toward Islam. In one fiery article, Mei Xinyu has stressed that if the Communist Party establishment does not implement populist measures on behalf of the Han, the Party risks being abandoned by the Han majority. Indeed, if the Party does not stand for the Han majority against Islam, Mei claims the Party’s fate could be the same as the Soviet establishment when people abandoned it *en masse* in 1991. Or, he points out that in the U.S. and Britain, populist democratic forces defeated the existing establishments, elected President Donald Trump and voted for Brexit.²⁸

In this same article, Mei even duplicitously claims—with evil intent—that some African Americans have fallen under the influence of ISIS and adopted a separatist agenda. He uses the “black Islamic movement and separatism” to characterize the “Black Lives Matter” civil rights movement. Meanwhile, Mei Xinyu praises the revitalized power of Han supremacism. He calls for radical changes in the Party-state’s ethno-religious policies, and advocates for a Chinese regime and nation of the majority, by the majority, and for the majority.

Effects on Communist Government Policy

THE RISE OF THE ANTI-ISLAM MOVEMENT IN CHINA NEEDS TO BE UNDERSTOOD IN the context of the Communist Party’s decades-long failure to assimilate non-Han populations. As Hu Angang, an economist at China’s Tsinghua University,²⁹ and Hu Lianhe, another Tsinghua researcher and officer of the United Front Work Department (the Party’s propaganda unit)³⁰ have argued, China’s current ethnic policy is outdated and needs to be updated to emphasize full integration in the context of China’s rejuvenation and “rise.”³¹ Such thinking clearly has driven the Party’s decision to redouble its efforts to “Sinify” Islam in China—including the present effort to construct camps for the “political re-education” of Muslims. At the same time, the Party’s “Sinification” policies, and the accompanying deterior-

ration of ethno-religious relations in the PRC, has become a convenient pretext for Party officials to coordinate their assertions, along with the growing cohort of anti-Muslim activists, that Islam is a primary source of disorder in the West, and obstruction in China's national rejuvenation.

Consider the evolution of the PRC's official policies: in 1989, China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television established an office to "eradicate pornography and illegal publication," which oversees publishing in print and audio-visual media.³² Then, in 2009, under the tutelage of that administrative office, the government of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region formed a regional mechanism, the "Eradicate Pornography and Illegal Publication Tianshan Project," which aimed to establish harsher policies toward Islam, not only in Xinjiang but also in the Hui Muslim areas located in Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, and Shaanxi provinces.

In the view of the authorities in Xinjiang, tolerant policies in adjacent Chinese provinces have emboldened Muslims, while impeding efforts to create stability and security inside Xinjiang. The stated goal of the Tianshan Project is to combat illegal publications that drive the "three evil forces:" extremism, separatism, and terrorism.³³ By legally encompassing the other four western provinces and their large non-Turkic/Hui Chinese Islamic populations, the Communist Party policy is clearly targeting Islam and Muslims through their repressive policies.

Nowadays, the power and influence of Xinjiang's anti-Muslim officials routinely reach far beyond the region's borders. For instance, an officially appointed Hui imam in Gansu Province—who was praised in 2015 by the state-controlled *Xinhua News* as a "model" imam—was arrested in 2016.³⁴ He was detained following his return to Xinjiang, after it was discovered that he had given a lecture to students, including Uyghurs, on Islam at a university in neighboring Gansu province.³⁵

Along similar lines, a Beijing bookstore owner, who had operated his store specializing on Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East for more than ten years in the Haidian District, was arrested by Xinjiang authorities and placed in a re-education camp. He was charged with "terrorism" for selling books about Islam.³⁶ More recently, members of provincial party organizations in West China including the Commission of Political and Legal Affairs from Ningxia, Qinghai, traveled to Xinjiang to learn lessons about "anti-terrorism and stability-maintenance." This, among other things, indicates that Xinjiang's repressive policing practices are being expanded to other Muslim-populated areas of West China.³⁷

Nowadays, many Xinjiang Party officials openly speak of the urgent need to banish all Islamic practices, including the observance of a halal diet.³⁸ Mocking these religious restrictions, Cui Zijian, an anti-Muslim propaganda official in

Xinjiang, nearly ignited a large-scale conflict when he called for Han residents to bury a pig's head in a mosque building site located in Hefei, Anwei.³⁹

Other Party restrictions on Islam in Xinjiang include ordering Muslim restaurants to sell alcohol,⁴⁰ shortening the dresses of Uyghur Muslim women that are deemed too conservative or long,⁴¹ and forcing Muslims to eat pork and drink alcohol while celebrating Han Chinese festivals.⁴² Xinjiang's Communist authorities have also banned newborn babies from being given Muslim names.⁴³ Even more disturbing, Uyghurs who have studied in Muslim countries, or fulfilled their *hajj* pilgrimage duty, or who have traveled abroad to the 26 Muslim countries that PRC has officially designated as "sensitive," have been rounded up and placed in prison camps.⁴⁴

Xinjiang's so-called "de-extremification" campaign clearly has become a struggle against Islam itself, which is meant to de-Islamicize the daily lives of Uyghur Muslims by criminalizing their normal religious practices.⁴⁵ As a result, in large parts of western China, the Communist government's policies toward Islam have become virtually indistinguishable from the demands made by Chinese anti-Muslim activists online. This toxic amalgam has led to some of the most egregious human rights abuses in today's world.

While Western societies may be dealing with populist anti-Muslim fears and concerns, their expression is generally constrained by public morality, basic human decency, and legal institutions that protect freedom of religion and other essential human rights. No such limitations exist in Communist China. Instead, anti-Muslim rhetoric has become deeply entangled with Han supremacism, and prospers alongside the Communist Party's imperative to maintain absolute control over people's lives. As a result, the Chinese state's repression of Muslims is now hardwired to grow even more severe, with ever more devastating consequences for Uyghurs and other Muslims in the PRC—and likely elsewhere. The Chinese people—and every nation of conscience and good will—must oppose these developments in China.

NOTES

1. For a study of the Ming policy towards Islam, see Yu Zhengui, *Yisilanjiao yu Zhongguo lidai zhengquan* (Islam and Chinese regimes), Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1996.
2. Gu Yanwu, *Rizhilu jishi* (juan 29), reprint, Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2013.
3. Chen Shiguan memorial, YZ02-09-12, *Gongzhongdang yongzhengchao zouzhe* (memorials of the Yongzheng reign), vol.3, p.177, Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1979.

4. Yue Zhongri memorial, “zouchen huadao Huiminshi zhe,” YZ07-03-17, *Gongzhongdang yongzhengchao zouzhe*, vol.12, p.694.
5. *Qingshiliao Muslim ziliaojilu* (sj), p.33, Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2009.
6. Guotai memorial, QL45-03-24, “Shandong xunfu Guotai guiwei shenni zoushi,” Number One Archives (Beijing).
7. Yang Huizhong, “dui dangdai Huizu fazhanzhong lishi kunraode sikao” in *Huizushi Lungao* (Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 1991). This study deliberately defines the term “Hui-phobia,” referring to Han anti-Hui sentiments as different from contemporary “Islamophobia,” which is largely developed in the West. For a discussion of modern Islamophobia in China, see Chang Chung-fu, “Is China Islamophobic? A Survey of Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” in *Zhenghe Forum, Connecting China and the Muslim World*, pp. 97-110, Kuala Lumpur: Malaya University Press, 2017.
8. This edict was engraved on a wooden tablet at the Oxen Street Mosque in 1694, which fits the Qing political context in which the Manchus and Zungar Mongols were at war with each other. Jin Tianzhu and other Muslim intellectuals frequently quoted this edict. For this Oxen-street Mosque stele, see Donald Leslie, *Islam in Traditional China, A Short History to 1800*, p.122, Canberra: College of Advanced Education, 1986.
9. Yongzheng edict, YZ08-05-10, *Qingshiliao Muslim ziliaojilu* (sj), p.32-34, Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2009.
10. *Qingshiliao Muslim ziliaojilu* (sj), p.32-33.
11. Jonathan Lipman mentions that Kodo Tazaka noted that the use of the Hui character with the component meaning “animal” started in the Ming dynasty. See Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p.41, footnote 54. Millward’s study suggests that the similar Chinese practice towards the Xinjiang Hui, or East Turkestanis, was banned in February 1760. James Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*, p.194, Stanford University, 1998.
 This literary disparagement, however, has also been seen in contemporary gazetteer-compiling projects in China. Yang Huaizhong cites one case in which local cultural officials of the Haiyuan County of Ningxia adopted this Qing-banned character in contemporary China. Yang Huaizhong, Yang Huizhong, “dui dangdai Huizu fazhanzhong lishi kunraode sikao” in *Huizushi lungao*.
12. *Qingshiliao Muslim ziliaojilu* (sj), p.590.
13. *Ibid* p.669.
14. Guotai memorial, QL45-03-24, “Shandong xunfu Guotai gui wei shenni zoushi,” Number One Archives (Beijing).
15. Luwei Rose Luqiu & Fan Yang (2018) “Islamophobia in China: news coverage, stereotypes, and Chinese Muslims’ perceptions of themselves and Islam,” *Asian Journal of Communication*, 28:6, pp.12-3.

16. Ibid. p.12.
17. For more information on these two social media platforms that promote Islamophobia, see Frankie Huang, "China's Most Popular App Is Full of Hate," *Foreign Policy*, November 27, 2018.
18. For an analysis of China's online anti-Muslim tendencies through the lenses of ethnic contradictions, internet extremism, online censure, and foreign influences, see Wang Jing, "Minzu maodun, wangluo jihua, xuanzexing shencha—jiepao Zhongguo wangluo fanmu qingxu," <https://theinitium.com/article/20190510-opinion-wangjing-muslimhatespeech-internet/>.
19. For an analysis of Xi Wuyi's Islamophobic history and tactics, see anonymous online article, "2018, Xi Wuyi yi zhengzhi douzheng de shouduan kaishi fanan yisilanjiao yanjiujie" (2018, Xi Wuyi uses politics attacks scholars on Islam), <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/YcQKA6J9tXHZv3GwtkGPTg>.
20. Anonymous researcher, "Weibo Statistics," 2017.
21. https://m.baidu.com/sf?pd=realtime_article&openapi=1&dispName=iphone&from_sf=1&resource_id=4584&word=%E8%A1%80%20%E6%A3%89%E7%AD%BE%20%E6%8B%89%E9%9D%A2&keysign=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.sohu.com%2Fa%2F195180369_694142&source=h5_mobile_a&fks=84072e&top=%7B%22sfhs%22%3A1%7D&title=%E8%A1%80%20%E6%A3%89%E7%AD%BE%20%E6%8B%89%E9%9D%A2&lid=11617458625430616811&referlid=11617458625430616811&ms=1&frsrcid=1599&frorder=1&from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0.
22. Major online Islamophobic activities are more or less involved with money. For instance, Daoist Liang has been accused of being a "patriotic thief" for selling so-called "indigenous" Daoist talismans in the name of nationalism and patriotism. He has also lambasted U.S. warships operating in the South China Sea and, according to him, his curses even caused U.S. shipwrecks. He uses this pretext to sell his Daoist symbols and curses. Hu Cheng, who is unemployed, capitalizes on growing anti-Islam sentiment to collect money online from other Islamophobes. These funds may pay for a trip to Xinjiang, or finance his publication in Taiwan of the so-called victimized history of the Han, or simply subsidize his survival. For Liang's description of his magic power and curses causing US shipwreck in South China Sea, see http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20170824/15601457_0.shtml; <http://duping.net/XHC/show.php?bbs=10&post=1368513>; for a discuss of Hu Cheng's online activities, see https://www.weibo.com/3744501897/GvwFBEZ5N?type=comment#_rnd1549225866964.
23. I thank an anonymous researcher for sharing her research findings with me. This is one of the typical public opinion studies carried out by many government agencies.
24. https://www.weibo.com/wflanker?is_hot=1.
25. <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/32506003>.
26. E.g. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1105913.shtml>;

- <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1132483.shtml>;
<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1023876.shtml>.
27. <http://www.kunlunce.com/gcyj/zhilijianyan/2019-01-26/130735.html>.
 28. For Mei's discussion of reverse discrimination and its implication on China, see <http://www.szhgh.com/Article/opinion/xuezhe/2017-02-08/130318.html>.
 29. For an introduction of Hu Angang and his worldview, see <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1297645/new-left-scholar-hu-angang-strident-defence-party-line>.
 30. For a detailed description of Hu Lianhe, see James Leibold, "Hu the Uniter: Hu Lianhe and the Radical Turn in China's Xinjiang Policy," *China Brief* (Jamestown Foundation), Volume 18, Issue:16. <http://jamestown.org/program/hu-the-uniter-hu-lianhe-and-the-radical-turn-in-chinas-xinjiang-policy/>.
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The Salafi-Jihadist Reaction to Hindu Nationalism

By Hari Prasad

AYMAN AL-ZAWAHIRI, THE LEADER OF AL-QAEDA, ANNOUNCED THE creation of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (Jamaat Qaidat al-Jihad fi'shibi al-qarrat al Hindiya, or AQIS) on September 4, 2014.¹ The establishment of this new al-Qaeda branch intersected with two other major political developments in 2014: the advent of the Islamic State's "caliphate" in Syria-Iraq (ISIS) in June, and, in May, the election in India of Narendra Modi's Bharitya Janata Party-led government (BJP), which brought Hindu Nationalism into the social and political mainstream. In response to these two developments, ISIS subsequently undertook to establish its own presence in South Asia. In May 2019, following an ISIS attack on Indian security forces in Kashmir, the caliphate movement announced that it had created a *Wilayah* (province) for India.²

Today, both ISIS and AQIS are competing throughout South Asia to win recruits, conduct terror attacks, and foment religious turmoil—and both have increasingly fixed their gaze on India. While it has been widely recognized these two Salafi-Jihadist movements are seeking to exploit Muslim-Hindu communal tensions in India for their own gain, less attention has been paid to their rhetoric about the Modi government and the social and political ascendancy of Hindutva or Hindu Nationalism. This dynamic demands greater attention.

For many Hindus, Hindutva simply means “Hinduness,” while the larger Hindutva movement stresses the unity, revitalization and celebration of Hinduism, the religious tradition of over 79 percent of the Indian population. Because many Hindus understand that Hinduism teaches pluralism and religious co-existence, the ongoing revival of Hinduism and its increasing role in Indian public life is not inherently at odds with the liberal democratic principles on which India was founded in 1947.³ However, since the Hindutva movement’s beginnings in the late British colonial period, many of its top ideologists have explicitly called for the establishment of a Hindu State, which exists by and for the Hindu majority. Further, many regard Islam as a religion that is alien to India; for them, Muslims are, at best, to be treated as second-class citizens and, at worst, to be regarded as a threat to Hindus and their nationhood. The rise of Hindu Nationalism in recent decades has, in fact, exacerbated communal tensions in parts of India, while Hindutva extremists have committed serial crimes against Muslims.

Zawahiri himself referenced these crimes—particularly the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002—when he announced the formation of AQIS.⁴ ISIS ideologists have since done the same. Indeed, Salafi-Jihadism has tried to show that India’s Hindus and Muslims are inexorably at odds with one another. For radical Islamists, the rise of Hindutva confirms this. Salafi-Jihadist rhetoric about Hindutva has focused on two primary issues: the oppression, both real and perceived, of Muslims under the BJP government in India, and the so-called “failure” of democracy in India. For Islamists, this alleged failure of democracy in India is evident in the Indian State’s failure to protect Muslims from Hindutva majoritarianism, discrimination, and violence. This, they claim, vindicates the Islamist view that democracy is intrinsically un-Islamic and against Muslims. Because of this, al-Qaeda and ISIS believe that India’s Muslims are required to fight the Hindutva movement. To this end, both groups are now attempting to shatter India’s democracy and traditions of religious co-existence in order to foment religious war.⁵

The Grayzone

THE PROPAGANDA OF SALAFI-JIHADISTS MAKES CLEAR THEIR AIM IS TO DESTROY what it terms the “grayzone”—that is, the plane of coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁶ This subject was discussed at length in ISIS’s English language magazine *Dabiq* (later renamed *Rumiya*), in February 2015, in an article titled “The Extinction of the Grayzone.”

For ISIS, the world is divided in two: the world of *kufir*/unbelief and the world of Islam (the latter specifically being the areas controlled by the Caliphate). The article cites a speech made by Osama Bin Laden shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States in which the former al-Qaeda leader proclaimed, “The world today is divided into two camps. Bush spoke the truth when he said, ‘Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.’ Meaning either you are with the crusade or you are with Islam.”⁷

The author of the *Dabiq* article explains that the grayzone will be destroyed both by the Islamic State as well as by non-Muslims in the “Crusader” nations. The author claims that the “Islamophobia” faced by Muslim minorities in the West is only strengthened by the existence of the caliphate movement and the violence it commits. As he explains,

The presence of the Khilafah also magnifies the political, social, economic, and emotional impact of any operation carried out by the mujahidin against the enraged crusaders to actively destroy the grayzone themselves, the zone in which many of the hypocrites and deviant innovators living in the West are hiding.⁸

Thus, by capitalizing on “Islamophobia” within Western societies, ISIS believes they will fuel anti-Muslim hate and delegitimize Muslim leaders and others who advocate for coexistence and democratic moderation. This, in turn, empowers greater anti-Muslim sentiment and bigotry in Crusader nations, which divides Muslims from their fellow citizens and facilitates the deterioration of enemy states. Anti-Muslim attacks will encourage other Muslims to defend themselves and strike back, leading to a cycle of brutality. In this escalation of hate and violence, the group hopes to leave Muslims with no choice but to join the caliphate movement. The author goes on to say that, with the establishment of the Caliphate,

Muslims in the West will quickly find themselves between one of two choices, they either apostatize and adopt the *kufir* religion propagated by Bush, Obama, Blair, Cameron, Sarkozy, and Hollande in the name of Islam, so as to live amongst the *kuffar* without hardship, or they perform hijrah to the Islamic State and thereby escape persecution from the crusader government and citizens.⁹

This strategy is hardly novel or unique in the history of Salafi-Jihadism. During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi advocated for a similar strategy to

provoke large-scale conflict between Sunni and Shia throughout the Middle East.¹⁰ For ISIS supporters, it is vital to eliminate the grayzone by polarizing societies, and forcing Muslims to choose the “world of Islam” as opposed to everything else.

While the grayzone article in *Dabiq* focused exclusively on destabilizing “Crusader” societies in the West, the ISIS and al-Qaeda propaganda about India reflects similar themes.¹¹ By declaring that Indian democracy has failed, and by highlighting the abuses of Muslims by extremist Hindutva forces, Salafi-Jihadism wants to persuade Indian Muslims they will never be accepted by their Hindu brethren. Their aim is to shatter religious co-existence and to ignite a religious war in India. They also believe the advance and rise to power of Hindu Nationalism will aid their efforts.

The Hindutva Movement

THE HINDUTVA MOVEMENT FIRST EMERGED WHEN INDIA WAS STILL RULED BY the British. Reacting to the perceived weakness of Hindus compared to their Abrahamic counterparts, a movement to reform and strengthen Hinduism emerged in the 19th Century. This reform movement subsequently split in various ways, with some who undertook to modernize the faith and others who wanted to take Hinduism back to a Golden Era, when Hindus dominated all of India. This set the stage for the rise of the Hindutva movement. The ideological movement spawned multiple organizations, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Hindu Mahasabha, and others, whose aim has been revitalize Hindu consciousness. Collectively, these organizations are referred to as the “Sangh Parivar,” or the “family” of organizations associated with the RSS.

Perhaps the best-known ideological text of the Hindutva movement is *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*¹² by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Written in 1923, Savarkar advocated for the creation of a “Hindu Nation.” He defined Hindus as a unique “race” of people whose homeland and holy lands were all in the Indian subcontinent. For Savarkar, Hindus were native to India while Muslims and Christians came to India as “invaders” and continue to adhere to “foreign ideologies” while they look to and pray in holy lands in the Middle East. On these grounds, the loyalty of these minorities to the Hindu Nation was suspect.

Savarkar’s ideas were controversial in his day, and remain so now. At best, his ideology has been interpreted as a blueprint for the creation of a Hindu-majority-

tarian government in which Muslims, Christians and other non-Hindus would be treated as second class citizens. At worst, Savarkar and other Hindutva leaders expressed support for eliminating—by force, if necessary—these “foreign” ideologies from the Hindu Nation.¹³

The Hindutva movement was marginalized after India’s independence in 1947. The assassination of Gandhi by a Hindutva extremist led the ruling Congress Party government to crackdown on and outlaw various Hindutva organizations. However, while the Indian Constitution sought to establish a liberal and secular order, Hindutva groups continued to work at the grassroots level to change society and revitalize Hindu national consciousness. There is a long history of Hindutva groups being involved in communal violence across the country.

In 1992, the destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) by Hindus shocked the entire nation. The Babri Masjid was constructed by the Mughals in the 16th Century in what is now Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. Hindutva organizations argued that a Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Rama had been razed by the Mughals to construct the mosque. For many in the Hindutva movement, Babri Masjid symbolized the subjugation of Hindus to Islam. It was on this belief that thousands of Hindutva volunteers mobilized to demolish the structure. This was followed by Anti-Muslim riots throughout India, with the city of Bombay being particularly affected. Hundreds of Muslims were reportedly killed in the ensuing disturbances.

Even today, repercussions from that violent event continue to roil the country. For many Hindu nationalists, the destruction of Babri Masjid came to symbolize the dawning of a new India—an India where Hindus were no longer weak, and Hindutva was ascendant.

The BJP as it is known today was formed in 1980.¹⁴ The party’s roots are in the family of Hindutva organizations that were banned after independence. But from 1998–2004, during the BJP’s first full term as the leading party, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and other party leaders helped to moderate and thus popularize Hindu nationalism. The period, however, was also affected by intensifying communal violence, including a deadly anti-Muslim pogrom. In the state of Gujarat (where Narendra Modi was then serving as Chief Minister), violence broke out in response to the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims on February 27, 2002. It is believed that Muslims had set the train on fire. In retaliation, Hindutva extremists and angry mobs committed horrendous violence against Muslims, killing over two thousand. There have been many allegations that Modi, as the state’s Chief Minister—who oversaw several ministers involved in the violence—was complicit in the pogroms. A court later cleared Modi, but his role in the violence continues to be disputed in India today.

For many Hindutva leaders and organizations, the violence against Muslims was met with glee. Ashok Singhal, then-president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, described the violence in Gujarat as a “successful experiment.”¹⁵ From an electoral standpoint, worsening communal tensions appears to have aided the BJP’s success at mobilizing Hindu voters while placating an Hindutva base.¹⁶ Meanwhile, little has been done to hold to account the organizers of the Gujarat violence, or, for that matter, the anti-Muslim pogroms in Mumbai in 1992 and Muzaffarnagar in 2013.

Although Modi did not campaign on a communal platform in 2014, it is undeniable that religious tensions have increased during his time as prime minister. There was, for instance, a notable escalation in lynchings throughout the country following his election. Human Rights Watch reported that at least 44 people—36 of them Muslims—were killed by Hindu vigilantes, some with ties to the governing party, across 12 Indian states between May 2015 and December 2018.¹⁷ During that period of unrest, Muslim men were murdered by Hindu extremists on the suspicion that they were smuggling beef. Analysis by the Indian factchecking website IndiaSpend has shown a noticeable increase in cow lynchings since 2014.¹⁸ In addition to these violent crimes, Hindutva politicians and activists have spread anti-Islamic conspiracies, charged Muslims with “wooing Hindu women” and other offenses to Hindu honor. They have also called illegal Muslim immigrants “termites,” as well as elevating politicians accused of terrorism against Muslims to positions of power.¹⁹ This polarized atmosphere has caused some leading Indian observers to worry about the future of secularism in India.²⁰ Simultaneously, intensifying communalist strife has presented opportunities upon which al-Qaeda and ISIS have hoped to capitalize.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the Subcontinent

DESPITE AL-QAEDA’S LONG HISTORY IN SOUTH ASIA, ITS CREATION OF A TERRORIST branch focused on the Indian subcontinent was tied explicitly to atrocities committed by Hindus against Muslims. Citing a hadith known as *Ghazwa-ul-Hind* which prophesies a war between Islam and the unbelievers in India, Zawahiri spoke about the Karachi Operation on September 6, 2014—the first attempted

attack by AQIS.²¹ He explained that the “operation gives a clear message to India that Ghazwa-e-Hind has only just begun. We shall never forget your oppression of our brothers in Kashmir, Gujarat, and Assam, and you shall reap what you sowed.”

In June 2017, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent released its “Code of Conduct.”²² The document details the group’s strategy, principles, and various allegiances. Section V is entitled “The Nature of the Enemy and Military Operations,” and it divides the group’s operations into three parts: fighting in Afghanistan, targets in Pakistan, and thirdly, targets and enemies in India, Bangladesh, and Arakaan (Burma). While it deals with both India and Bangladesh together, the AQIS document makes clear that armed jihadism in India is the priority, because India “is the prime defender of secular government and secular movements in Bangladesh, and provides every sort of support to blasphemers of the Messenger (SWT) and to Mulhids.”²³

In addition to the necessity of attacking India because of the country’s desire to “make the Muslims of Bengal live as its slaves,”²⁴ the Code of Conduct also accuses India of “executing the policy of oppressing the Muslims in Kashmir and India, destroying their homes, weakening them in social status, and coercing them to convert to Hinduism. The cruelty and oppression on the Muslims in Kashmir and India clearly demonstrate this fact.”²⁵

Interestingly, however, the document also states that AQ should avoid attacks on Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist civilians.²⁶ And in fact, with the exception of the Karachi operation, AQIS has carried out relatively few major attacks.²⁷ The majority of AQ’s violence has been against secularist Bangladeshi bloggers and activists for alleged blasphemy.²⁸ Despite the organization’s prioritizing of India as a target, there do not seem to have been any other major attacks directly carried out by AQIS.

Unlike al-Qaeda, ISIS has not had a long history in the Indian subcontinent. According to Amira Jadoon of the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, ISIS has been able to expand in South Asia in recent years by making alliances with other extremist groups in the region.²⁹ One of the earliest examples of an Indian group joining the caliphate movement took place in September 2014, when a relatively unknown group named *Ansar-ul-Tahid Fi Bilad Al Hind* pledged allegiance.³⁰

But perhaps what has been more surprising has been ISIS’s success in recruiting Indians to join their cause. Kabir Taneja, an ISIS expert at India’s Observer Research Foundation, found at least 112 cases of Indians attempting to join ISIS or to create an affiliate.³¹ In the early days of the ISIS Caliphate, one of the primary propaganda accounts for the group was an Indian working with the online

moniker, @ShamiWitness.³² Despite this, ISIS did not establish a formal *Wilayah* for India (*Wilayah Hind*) until May 10, 2019. Prior to this, actions carried out by ISIS were either affiliated with the Khorasan (Afghanistan/Pakistan) province³³ or with no specific branch.³⁴

Disturbingly, the Easter Sunday attacks on April 21, 2019 in Sri Lanka exposed a network of ISIS sympathizers from Sri Lanka through South India, including the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.³⁵ The number of ISIS jihadis was surprising, since in previous years AQIS had struggled to recruit new Indian members.³⁶ That began to change, however, with the allegiances of Kashmiri groups, as well as the formation of the AQ-aligned Ansar Ghazwatul Hind (AGH) in 2017. All this allowed AQIS to establish a firmer foothold in the region.³⁷

A January 2019 report, “Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: The Nucleus of Jihad,” published by security consultants at The Soufan Center acknowledges the widening communal divide between Hindus and Muslims. It also reports on the spread of Wahhabism in the region, which provides an exploitable opportunity for jihadi groups.³⁸ As we shall see from Salafi-Jihadist propaganda, that communal divide remains a prime area of focus.

The Oppression of Muslims

ACCORDING TO SOME INDIAN ISIS SYMPATHIZERS, FEW JIHADIS REALIZE THE difficulties that Indian Muslims face. As a Malayali ISIS supporter has pointed out, India was declared a *Dar ul Harb* by jihadi sheikhs only because of the Kashmiri conflict. “That the world’s Muslims do not know anything about the RSS/Sangh Parivar, which is an existential threat to Indian Muslims, is a failure of Indian Muslims. If they had shown one-tenth of their efforts to get Arab’s funds to let others know about the dangers they face, this wouldn’t have happened.”³⁹

In 2017, AQIS and its affiliates regularly published various forms of propagandized media targeting India. The theme of Hindus oppressing Muslims runs throughout their videos. Between November and December of 2017, AQIS published a media series called “Saffron Terror.” The title references the controversial moniker of terrorism committed by Hindu groups against Muslims in India.⁴⁰ The series was produced by a media house called “1857,” a clear reference to the failed 1857 uprising against the British East India Company.

Each video in the series follows a similar pattern. They begin with a clip of a

Muslim being brutalized by Hindu nationalists, or of a Hindutva ideologue making derogatory remarks about Islam. This is followed by Urdu textual commentary or a statement by an AQIS leader.

The first video in the series shows an elderly Muslim man surrounded by Hindutva thugs.⁴¹ Several of these Hindutvadis (Hindutva members) have seized the man, with one specifically grasping the man's beard. The elderly Muslim is forced to repeat several chants including, "*Jai Jai Sri Ram* (Victory to Lord Rama, a major Hindu God)," "Narendra Modi is our Daddy, long live Hindustan," and other derogatory remarks about Muslims.⁴² This is followed by an Arabic recitation of a *Surah Al Nahl* verse from the Quran, "Any one who, after accepting faith in Allah, utters Unbelief—except under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in Faith—but such as open their breast to Unbelief, on them is Wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful Penalty."

The video then moves on to play an audio clip from BBC Urdu about an Indian Supreme Court decision allowing Sikhs to maintain a beard in the military, but not Muslims. The Supreme Court justified this by stating that Islam does not view a beard as a religious obligation. The video ends with an Urdu declaration:

Oh unbelievers! Your enemies of Islam. Making fun of the Sharia of Islam. Grabbing ordinary Muslims and pulling their beards. Then forcing them to recite the Kufr-e-Kalima will put out the fire in your hearts. The malice you have towards Islam will extinguish you. To deem the beard as Un-Islamic, means you cannot follow the Sunna of the Prophet. To call it a tradition of the Sikhs, you cannot eliminate the ummah of the Muslims from their heart.

The Prophet proclaimed,

Counter the unbelievers, grow your beards and cut your moustaches. As per the Quran it is necessary to do so. Plus as per all four schools of Islamic thoughts (Hanafi, Malii, Shafi and Hanbali) it is required.

The second video shows a clip of a young Muslim man being violently assaulted, presumably by three Hindutva men.⁴³ The Hindutvadis threaten the young Muslim with a pistol and reveal that he was carrying meat on his motorcycle. The Hindu nationalists presume that the meat is beef, hence justifying the assault. The UN logo is then shown, accompanied by an Urdu text saying, "Where are the

pig-meat eating flagbearers of human rights? This barbarism...Why are they silent about the ones who martyr Muslims. Does keeping Muslims away from God's given halal meat not count as a human rights violation?" The second video concludes by citing a verse from *Surah Al Nisa*, and stating "No respect can be attained without Jihad."

Part three in the Saffron Terror video series begins with a man tied to a tree, forced by a group of men to recite *Jai Sri Ram*.⁴⁴ The video concludes with audio from Maulana Asim Umar Hafizullah, the Emir of AQIS, stating:

Upon the basis strength, can tawheed followers be turned into Hindus? Through the state's devious behavior, can the slaves of Mohammed (PBUH) be turned away from Islam? Have Hindus not read about the history of Makkah? Even the idol worshippers of Makkah would treat those who adhered to Islam like this. They used to make them lie down [sic] put rocks on their chests. Through that the fat of the body used to melt away. But this is how Mohammed (PBUH) grew to love Islam.

The final video of the series is also its longest, clocking in at nearly seven minutes.⁴⁵ Unlike previous ones, the video does not dramatize instances of Muslims being assaulted. Instead, it highlights what some Hindutva-aligned politicians and other figures have said about Muslims and Islam. These include threats to eliminate Islam, calls for Muslims to leave India, and promises to restrict religious freedom for the community.

Unsurprisingly, the major incidents of Hindutva violence against Muslims, such as Gujarat or Bombay, are frequently referenced. An al-Qaeda aligned Telegram channel, @LetAmeenSpeak, spread around this message on several different occasions:

February 28, 2002 in Gujarat;

Kauser Bano (May Allah have mercy on her), was nine months pregnant that day. Hindutva fascists approached her.

Her belly was torn open and her foetus wrenched out, held aloft on the tip of a sword, then dashed to the ground and flung into a fire. This is just one incident among many. These enemies of Islam had another intention than just to wipe Islam from the area. They came

to snatch the honour by raping Muslim girls in the most indecent manner.

The riots in India doesn't stop here. When the government is ruled by the same group who carried out the above mentioned horrific massacres, there needs no further explanation how much blood will be spilling in the coming days.

There is only two choices for Muslims of India to regain the honour and dignity; Shariah or Shahadah (martyrdom)!

Various Telegram channels amplified the Saffron Terror narrative with references to other incidents of anti-Muslim violence in India. An account associated with AQIS-aligned AGH, @BattleHind1, posted a reference to the 2002 Gujarat pogroms:

Muslims were slaughtered by Brahmin-dominated Hindu Extremist groups in Gujarat in 2002.

CM of Gujarat was Modi who became Prime Minister of India Now. Without any doubt he was behind the massacre.

English Video showing ground reports from Muslims who witnessed this atrocities.

Muslims living under Modi should remember this and try to start working for the freedom from Brahmin State.

Various references to the destruction of Babri Masjid appear frequently in the propaganda. As the pro-AQIS account @LetAmeenSpeak posted,

Dec 6, 1992—The Day Babri was Martyred!

India has witnessed the most heinous crime on 6 December 1992 when a frenzied mob of hindu extremists pushed the historic Babri Masjid built by Mughal empire into the pages of history.

They stormed the Masjid in Ayodhya and demolished it with no resistance from police and para-military forces. Babri Masjid demolition also resulted in bloody riots in several major cities of the country surpassing all previous limits in brutality, killing and raping.

By any account, Babri Masjid's demolition and subsequent riots remain a shame for modern secular India.

To mark the 25th anniversary of the Babri Masjid's demise,⁴⁶ AGH released a 10-minute video centered around the destruction of the mosque.⁴⁷ Narrated by Mohammad Taufeeq, alias Sultan Zabul Al Hindi,⁴⁸ the video connects the Babri Masjid event and its after-effects to the current attacks on Indian Muslims, as well as the assault on *Lal Masjid* by Pakistan in 2007.

Beginning with a narration of the Ghazwa-e-Hind hadith,⁴⁹ Al Hindi assures his listeners that the Mujahideen have not ignored the oppression of Indian Muslims. Referring to Prime Minister Modi as India's "Nimrod" (i.e, the tyrant who challenged God), he claims that:

This Hindu deceiver will keep on changing his colours until his mission isn't complete and his mission is the murder of India's Muslim, be it a kid or an elder, whether it is a man or woman. Be it our parent or our brother. This enemy's enmity is with our existence. His enmity is with our faith. His enmity is with our faith. His enmity is with our kalmia. And his enmity is with aur nimaaz. The Babri Masjid was not simply the destruction of one building, but rather the destruction of a symbol that has stood in place ever since Islam dominated the subcontinent. That Babri Masjid which was a symbol of our faith. It was a witness of a time when there was Islam's domination. This enemy's sights are not only on Babri Masjid, but on every Masjid in every bylane. This (referring to Modi) enemy's sights are on every believers' belief and it has prepared for its mission entirely.

To fight Prime Minister Modi and the Hindutva movement, it is necessary for Muslims to take the path of jihad. This requires more than simply protecting the lives of India's Muslims, but also guarding their honor and beliefs....

Jihad isn't only defending our lives, but the safeguarding of our honour and safeguarding of our beliefs. If we don't start making preparations quickly, then you better believe that this enemy will not stop. Our enemy wants that in every Muslim household there should be a Akhlaq, a Junaid, and Pehlu Khan [the names of Muslim individuals who were lynched by Hindu mobs]. Hence, it is necessary that we as one should become a wall and bring together our strength. Our belief and our honour only lie in Jihad. Life is only in Jihad.

Al Hindi argues that Modi and his allies wish to bring about *Ram Rajya*, or the Kingdom of the Lord Ram, and that such Hindu majoritarianism would be disastrous for India's Muslims.⁵⁰ The only solution to this is "the promulgation of Sharia for which God has given the order for Jihad."

Blog posts in Malayalam (a Dravidian language spoken in the state of Kerala) by ISIS supporters also highlight the "crimes" of Hindutva forces against Indian Muslims stating, "The Sangh Parivar doesn't want any reason to kill people, they just need a Muslim name."⁵¹ Later in the same post, the author says,

Aren't Modi Ministers challenging everyday that India would be made a Hindu Rashtra? They know you are helpless. They are spitting on the face of believers. Waves of Islamophobia. Their enemy is your *tauhid*...We see daily reports on how a people who worship only Allah and want to live according to his laws are being tortured because of their faith. Realise that it's our responsibility to do *jihad* against the *kafirs* who destroyed hundreds of Allaha's [sic] homes, including Babri Masjid, and raped Muslim sisters and did Holi-dance on the graves of our brothers and sisters in Bombay, Gujarat and several other towns and villages.

The necessity for India's Muslims to make *hijrah* (migrate) to the Islamic State and to "choose Islam" over all its purported enemies is made clear in a message distributed across an ISIS Telegram channel, @theanf11:

India Muslims need to either make hijrah (perhaps to Kashmir) or start jihad including lone wolves. Don't they see how many members of RSS are there in different branches who learn war tactics and fighting skills? They are preparing for war against Muslims.

They have 100s of 1000s members. Even their women and children are learning to fight. Have they not heard their leaders spit venom against Muslims? They even call for raping dead bodies of Muslim women.

The theme of Muslim oppression by the Hindutva organizations make clear that, in Islamists' eyes, jihad is more than a religious obligation. It is a sacred necessity to protect the lives and honor of the Muslim community.

Indian Democracy

THE ISIS AND AL-QAEDA DISCUSSIONS ON INDIAN DEMOCRACY REFLECT EARLIER debates among Indian Islamists. As explained by anthropologist Irfan Ahmad of the Max Planck Institute in Germany, the rise of Hindu nationalism and its capture of state institutions in the late 1990s and early 2000s caused anxiety among India's Muslims, including Islamist organizations.⁵² The Jamaat Islami reacted to Hindutva's rise by putting its support behind the secular principles of the constitution, which aims to protect all religions. Meanwhile, other groups, like the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), reacted to Hindutva's rise by radicalizing.

In many ways, the Salafi-Jihadist debate about Indian democracy has similar contours to the one within the Jammata Islami of the early 2000s. But today's debate differs in two ways. First, for Salafi-Jihadists, there is no room for accepting the Indian constitution or its liberal and secular principles. Second, Salafi-Jihadists assert that the rise to power of Hindutva is the natural outcome of an inherently oppressive democratic system. Zawahiri stated the following during the creation of AQIS:

As for our brothers and our people in Kashmir, Gujarat, Assam, and Ahmadabad who are living under the dark shade of Hindu occupation, I would like to say that perhaps the crimes that you have witnessed, and that are still taking place before your eyes, expose the extent of deception and falsity of the nationalist democratic way, which calls for your participation, side by side with the Hindus, in a national democratic system that brings together Hindus and Muslims. Perhaps you would have realised by now

that this system brings Muslims and Hindus together, only to present the Muslims as an easy prey to the Hindus.

A message from @BattleHind1 from AGH conveyed a similar sentiment. Condemning the Indian Muslims who celebrated the 70th anniversary of India's independence, the group pointed out the hypocrisy of India's "independence," as extremist Hindus in Kashmir and elsewhere continue to oppress the community. Expanding on that, the message goes on to say,

To the Muslims in India! How long are you going to sleep and dream about the peace and harmony by which Hindus are trying to enslave your mind? How long are you going to obey the so called holy book "The Constitution of India" which contradicts the Holy Quran of Allah (swt)? Why do you want to be the slave of this constitution, while Allah has ordered us to reject these man-made laws?

The deepest analysis of the relationship between Indian Muslims and the state comes from a Malayalam pro-ISIS social media post.⁵³ In their words, India is part of the *Dar ul-Harb*, so jihad by India's Muslims is an obligation. According to this ISIS supporter, there are two things that would allow a Muslim to prevent a jihad: the peace pact between Indian Muslims and others, and completion of *hujjat* (proof).

One argument for a peace pact could be that India's Constitution serves as such a pact, if Indian Muslims are willing to accept a peace pact with India's non-Muslim communities. However, the ISIS commentator views the Indian constitution as an invalid peace pact. First, the constitution requires recognizing India's sovereignty in return for protection and safety. This would mean that Muslims are breaking *tawhid* and accepting another's rule instead of Allah's rule, and thus it would compromise their faith.

The second objection is straightforward: the promises of India's liberal constitution are not kept. "Indian Muslims are facing discrimination and injustice across the country. In other words, even if Indian Muslims have made maximum compromises on the *deen*, they still haven't got the safety and peace which the constitution promises."⁵⁴

Referring to the Hindutva forces as fascists, the objections continue: "Even after 70 years of getting independence, Indian Muslims have not got equal justice, equal opportunity or protection from the fascists. This is Allah's punishment for leaving his *deen*."⁵⁵

Opinions about whether India's Muslims actually have a peace pact with non-Muslim communities is decidedly more mixed. The Malayali ISIS supporters acknowledge that a significant portion of the non-Muslim communities want to live in peace, so this should be seen as an informal peace treaty and these people should not be harmed or hurt.⁵⁶ However, there are two segments of Indian society with which an informal peace treaty is not possible: the Sangh Parivar and the *Jabras* (a reference to Malayali atheists active in social media debates). As the ISIS supporter wrote, "Sangh fascists do not want peace with Muslims. They are in the forefront of annihilating Muslims. So jihad against them is compulsory for Muslims. All Sanghi members theoretically accept and support that Muslims should be eliminated. Therefore, Muslims should wage *jihad* against the Sanghi."⁵⁷

As all of these statements affirm, Salafi-Jihadists perceive democracy as a tool for the oppression of Muslims in India and beyond. Furthermore, democracy also compromises Islamic belief in God's laws, and meanwhile the promises of Indian democracy have failed. This democratic oppression, they argue, will only increase with Hindu Nationalists in power.

Conclusion

ISIS AND AL-QAEDA IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT HAVE MAINTAINED SIMILAR narratives on Hindu Nationalism. Their propaganda highlights the violence and discrimination faced by some of India's Muslims, while Indian democracy is blamed for causing this oppression. Salafi-Jihadism's overall goal in India is to shatter the "grayzone," to destroy religious co-existence, and to incite an Islamist insurrection against Indian democracy.

However, despite increasing communal tensions, relatively few Indian Muslims have so far joined either group. Likewise, Hindus who support the Modi government do not necessarily support the goals of extremist elements in the Hindutva movement.⁵⁸ Indeed, some Indian Muslim commentators have even taken the challenges posed by the social and political ascendancy of the Hindutva movement as a call to improve their own material and societal conditions.⁵⁹ Moreover, despite the real threats posed by Salafi-Jihadism, Indian institutions and civil society have shown great resilience.

After the BJP's sweeping victory in the 2019 elections, Prime Minister Modi

stated the core task for the government ahead must be to establish trust with all Indians, regardless of their faith. The Hindutva movement today comprises a wide spectrum—from those who support democratic co-existence and pluralism rooted in Hindu principles, to others who are seeking to advance majoritarian and jingoistic politics, or far more extreme and violent agendas. But while the now more powerful than ever Hindu nationalist movement grapples with all this, communal tensions in India will continue to be exploited by Salafi-Jihadist groups. As ISIS and AQIS strive to eliminate the grayzone and incite greater conflict, a wise response from Indian statesmen and India’s citizens will be essential to defend democratic co-existence and secure the nation.

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Assessing Europe's Efforts to Oppose Islamist Extremism

By Robin Simcox

ISLAMISM POSES SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL AND SECURITY CHALLENGES to governments across Europe. At present, it is unclear whether those governments are capable of successfully confronting Islamism's challenges. This is, perhaps, a surprising proposition since Islamism is a very familiar ideology to many Europeans; it has decades-long roots in Europe. Innumerable Islamist dissidents from authoritarian states in the Middle East and North Africa became political refugees in European states, which offered them generous asylum policies. Long before the Syrian civil war and the ensuing jihadi activity, some of these European Islamists began traveling to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Yemen and Bosnia to participate in jihad and receive training from radical groups.

In recent years, the harmful impact of Islamist ideology has been increasingly apparent. Between 5,000 and 6,000 Europeans traveled to Syria to fight in the conflict there, with many going on to join the Islamic State.¹ Since 2015, major Islamist attacks have taken place in London and Paris on multiple occasions, as well as in Brussels, Nice, Berlin, Manchester, Stockholm, and Barcelona. There were also dozens of lower-level attacks, such as those in Copenhagen, Turku, Marseilles, and Amsterdam, with many more plots thwarted.

In European countries, the response to these attacks has been, on one level,

relatively uniform. Terror suspects were arrested; legislation was tweaked to make foreign terrorist fighters' travel illegal; physical barriers were erected across major cities to prevent vehicular attacks; armed police became a more common sight. Yet the threat of terrorist attacks shows no sign of disappearing. And the current workload—for police, security agencies, and judges—is unsustainable.²

This dilemma has led governments to focus on specific prevention programs, meant to tackle factors that lead to radicalization, including cultural sympathy for both violent and non-violent extremism. European responses to prevention have been less than uniform, partially because there is still significant disagreement about how to identify the triggers of Islamist violence in the first place.

Determining precisely what factors lead to radicalization is a pressing challenge. In fact, beyond the violent Islamist threat, the influence of political Islam and varying shades of Salafism are also growing across Muslim communities in Europe. This, too, has harmful social consequences.

The scale of the problem facing Europe was exacerbated by the decision made by Germany in 2015 to open its borders to refugees fleeing conflicts in Muslim-majority countries. While security threats undoubtedly entered with the refugee flow (or individuals were radicalized and became threats once in Europe), the refugee issue has also introduced social and cultural questions relevant to overall cohesion and integration in Europe.

This essay looks at these issues from the perspective of four European countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden and France. Islamist terrorists have attacked each country in the last two years, and each has taken differing approaches to preventing extremism and facilitating integration. Dozens of conversations with government officials from across Europe have informed my conclusions.

United Kingdom

THE UK HAS FACED 37 PUBLICLY DISCLOSED INCIDENTS OF ISLAMIST-INSPIRED terrorism or acts of violence between January 2014 and December 2018. Eight of these incidents led to deaths or injuries, with five occurring in 2017 alone.³

As of March 2017, there were 23,000 Islamist terror threats on the UK intelligence radar. Within this, approximately 3,000 were being actively monitored or investigated in some 500 separate operations.⁴ Around 900 individuals left the UK for Syria or Iraq, with about 180 killed there and 360 returnees.⁵ As with

every other European country, the UK has struggled to find evidence, usable in a civilian court, with which to prosecute their foreign fighters upon return.⁶

When it comes to countering the terrorism threat, the UK has long focused on prevention: “Prevent” is one of four strands within the government’s counter-terrorism strategy, in which the UK attempts to provide local communities with tools to challenge extremism. The other three strands are Pursue, Protect and Prepare.

In its earliest iterations, Prevent’s focus was on stopping acts of violence against Britain and British interests abroad while scrutinizing local grievances.⁷ This effort was partially compromised by the government’s reliance on a small group of Jamaat-e-Islami and Muslim Brotherhood legacy organizations directing their approach to Islam. These groups were, at best, ambivalent toward and at times supportive of terrorism.

Ownership of Prevent initially lay with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which emphasized the importance local councils should play in its efforts.⁸ Yet in reality, local authorities had no clear idea of the most effective way to spend Prevent funding. Islamist groups, who encouraged segregation from British society, ended up receiving government cash, while a Parliamentary committee concluded that money had “been wasted on unfocused or irrelevant projects.”^{9,10}

There was a drastic shift away from this approach after a Conservative Liberal-Democrat coalition came to power in May 2010. A revamped Prevent was taken from DCLG and handed to the Home Office, putting a new strategy toward addressing ideology at the front and center of the problem facing the UK.¹¹ Furthermore, it was now not just terrorism, but also non-violent extremism that had to be tackled, as “terrorism is associated with rejection of a cohesive, integrated, multi-faith society and of parliamentary democracy.”^{12,13} That meant focusing on all forms of ideological extremism—from the far right to Islamist—affecting the UK.

The government also rejected the big tent approach of the past. Instead, it explicitly stated “we will not work with extremist organizations that oppose our values of universal human rights, equality before the law, democracy and full participation in our society. If organizations do not accept these fundamental values, we will not work with them and we will not fund them.”¹⁴

In the years following the review, and despite much criticism, the UK government has doubled down on its strategy. Prevent-related legislation passed in 2015 legally required certain authorities—prisons, hospitals, or education providers, for example—to “have due regard” to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Training was provided to help identify those at risk of being radicalized. This, too, related to both violent and non-violent extremism.¹⁵

The government's ongoing dedication to focus on both violent and non-violent extremism is reflected in several other initiatives. Perhaps most controversial was the official review of the Muslim Brotherhood launched in 2014. While the full text remains classified, a published executive summary concluded that "aspects of Muslim Brotherhood ideology and tactics, in this country and overseas, are contrary to our values and have been contrary to our national interests and our national security."¹⁶

Another UK foray into the challenge of non-violent extremism arrived with the 2015 Counter-Extremism strategy that promised a "more assertive approach to defeat extremists" and to "challenge their ideology, and defend and promote the values that unite us."¹⁷ To assist in this, a Commission for Countering Extremism was launched in 2018, headed by Sara Khan, a vocal critic of Islamist ideology and extremism.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the UK has been active in considering how best to achieve integrated communities. To that end, in July 2015, Dame Louise Casey was tasked with carrying out a review for the government.

Casey saw a pattern of increased segregation and concluded that the UK had, "lost sight of our expectations on integration and lacked confidence in promoting it or challenging behaviors that undermine it."¹⁹ Too many public institutions had, in Casey's view, "gone so far to accommodate diversity and freedom of expression that they have ignored or even condoned regressive, divisive and harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded racist or Islamophobic."²⁰

Among Casey's recommendations were a greater emphasis on British values and history in school, more English-language classes, and an integration oath for newly arrived immigrants.²¹

Unfortunately, momentum on the counter-extremism and integration agenda was lost when Prime Minister David Cameron resigned after the Brexit vote of June 2016. A long-promised Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill is yet to emerge. At the same time, the government's commitment to Islamist disengagement is wavering: The Home Office has recently renewed engagement with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), for example, one of the groups aligned with Jamaat-e-Islami that was left out in the cold by the 2011 Prevent review.²² The government has potentially even begun to relent on its commitment to Prevent, recently agreeing to an independent review of the program's effectiveness (a step for which some of Prevent's more strident critics had been clamoring).

Meanwhile, the Casey report is viewed by Whitehall as too controversial and has been quietly shelved. When asked by a journalist in December 2017 what progress had been made on her recommendations, Casey replied "absolutely

nothing.”²³ In March 2018, she spoke again about her “incredible frustrati[on]” at the lack of progress made on her community cohesion agenda.²⁴

Germany

BETWEEN JANUARY 2014 AND DECEMBER 2018, GERMANY FACED 34 ISLAMIST PLOTS or acts of violence, nine of which led to casualties. Germany’s Ministry of the Interior declared, “the Islamist following comprised a total of 25,810 individuals.”²⁵ Within this are around 2,240 jihadists. Approximately 770 are considered to be especially high-risk.²⁶

By early 2017, over 1,000 militants left Germany for Syria, with around 300 returning;²⁷ Some 145 were known to have died.²⁸

Furthermore, the threat continues to be on the rise: Federal prosecutors dealing with approximately 80 terror cases in 2013 thought they would be confronting between 1,300 and 1,400 cases by the end of 2018.²⁹ As of April 2018, there was assessed to be 11,000 Salafists in Germany, a number that has multiplied dramatically since 2013.³⁰

Germany’s security problems are directly linked to its asylum policies. The government let in almost 1.5 million asylum seekers, mainly from Muslim-majority countries, between 2015 and 2017.³¹ Of the 34 plots of violence my research identified, asylum seekers carried out fourteen (41 percent).³² The majority of those plotters were recent arrivals into the country, many from Syria.³³ By way of comparison, the then-head of Germany’s domestic central criminal investigation agency stated that only 11 plots were disrupted between 2000 and 2013.³⁴ There was no major Islamist atrocity in this period, compared to post-2015 attacks in Berlin, Ansbach, and Hamburg, among others.

One possible response by the German government has been to deport those who have no legal right to be in the country. As of November 2015, Germany had identified around 150,000 people it wished to deport.³⁵ At least 36 Islamists were deported in 2017, and 46 more in 2018.³⁶ Germany has even begun to pay asylum seekers to leave the country, offering funds as high as 3,000 euros.³⁷

However, Germany has had significant problems in deporting even those individuals it knows have no legal basis for being in the country. One reason is that deportation is not a federal task, but one that falls to the states (*Bundesländer*). Authorities in the conservative south, in states such as Bavaria, have taken a tougher approach. But in the more liberal north—in Berlin and North Rhine

Westphalia for example—authorities have been more reluctant to pursue deportations. Some northern judges have also been unwilling to approve bone x-rays in order to ascertain an asylum applicant’s actual age, complaining that it is discriminatory.³⁸ One consequence has been multiple rape-murders committed by adult asylum seekers who falsely claimed to be minors in order to remain in the country.³⁹

The depth of support within Germany for its asylum policies is uncertain. A February 2017 poll for the Chatham House think tank showed that 53 percent of Germans agreed with the statement “all further migration from mainly Muslim countries should be stopped.” Only 19 percent disagreed; 28 percent were unsure.⁴⁰ Another recent poll showed that 62 percent of Germans wanted to turn away at the border asylum seekers without proper documentation.⁴¹

Despite this, in the September 2017 election, the politician inextricably associated with Germany’s asylum policy—Chancellor Angela Merkel—retained power. (She has since resigned as leader of her party and will not seek re-election after 2021.) The party most associated with a hardline on immigration—the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)—came in third, with nearly 13 percent of the vote, and a recent poll had the AfD as the second-most popular party in Germany.⁴²

When it comes to prevention policy, such programs have existed in Germany since 1992. Unlike other European countries, however, the roots of Germany’s prevention work do not lie in concern over Islamist violence, but with regards to the far right. Neo-Nazi murders of Turkish small business owners, which began at the turn of the 21st Century, particularly focused minds on that problem.⁴³

Today, the government centers its efforts on all forms of extremism, which it aims to combat by promoting democracy. Much prevention work takes place at the *Bundesländer* level, which has responsibility for the police, jails, education, youth programs, and social work.

Meanwhile, the federal government has launched “Live Democracy! Active Against Right-Wing Extremism, Violence and Hate.” Housed within the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), “Live Democracy!” aims to support those “actively working towards their aim of a diverse, non-violent and democratic society.”⁴⁴ This is complemented by the Ministry of the Interior’s “Cohesion through Participation” program, which “funds projects for democratic participation and against extremism specifically in rural, structurally weak regions.”⁴⁵

These ministries co-published the overarching “Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy” in July 2016. This strategy focuses on all forms of extremism while also highlighting its attempts to minimize various forms of

prejudice. In 2017, the federal government committed itself to spending more money on prevention programs, a move informed by an increase in Islamist activity.⁴⁶

A 2015 poll carried out in Lower Saxony for the BMFSFJ revealed that 27 percent of Muslim students agreed with the statement “[t]he Islamic laws of Sharia, according to which, for example, adultery or homosexuality are severely punished, are much better than the German laws.” Almost one-fifth—19 percent—agreed that “[i]t is the duty of every Muslim to fight unbelievers and spread Islam around the world.”⁴⁷ Clearly, there are ample problems for Germany’s government to address when it comes to Islamism.

Sweden

NORDIC COUNTRIES ARE ALSO DEALING WITH A JIHADIST THREAT, WITH AN APRIL 2017 vehicular attack in Stockholm the highest-profile incident so far. The fact that this plot occurred in Sweden was no great shock, as the risk there has been surging for years: The number of Islamist sympathizers reflected on Stockholm’s intelligence radar in December 2010 was around 200; by July 2017, that number had shot up to 2,000.⁴⁸ At least 300 individuals traveled from Sweden to fight in Syria or Iraq,⁴⁹ and around half have since returned.⁵⁰

In Stockholm, a more developed Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policy is seen as a vital part of the response to terrorism. Sweden’s approach to prevention is focused on crime prevention (stopping acts of violence) and addressing grievances, rather than on tackling ideology. Officials cite a commitment to freedom of speech as a reason it has been reluctant to wade into addressing non-violent Islamist ideology.⁵¹

At first, prevention work was the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Democracy, which reflected the fact that Sweden saw promotion of human rights and democracy as the best barrier to terrorist violence.⁵² However, prevention efforts were recently placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice, a move that was discussed before the April 2017 attacks and was formalized afterwards.⁵³

Around twenty of Sweden’s public agencies also work on violent extremism.^{54,55} For example, in January 2018, a Center for Preventing Violent Extremism was formed, working under the National Council for Crime Prevention in the Ministry of Justice. It is “tasked with developing the knowledge-based and cross-sector work involved in preventing violent extremism on the national, regional, and local levels in Sweden.”⁵⁶

From the Swedish perspective, a significant challenge to prevention efforts is the central government's lack of power. There are 290 municipalities in Sweden—branches of local government—which have autonomy over the provision of social services and education (within national guidelines). Those engaged in prevention work believe that these sectors are ideally placed to detect early warning signs of radicalization. However, the municipalities have a strongly independent bent, and to the extent they have focused on radicalization warning signs, their concerns have centered on the far right—a movement with historic and familiar roots in Sweden.

Municipal and central government interaction was supposed to be improved with the 2014 appointment of a National Coordinator for Safeguarding Democracy from Violent Extremism (initially a three-year mandate which has now been made permanent). According to the government, the main task of the National Coordinator is, “to develop and reinforce the work taking place at local level and ensure that there is cooperation between government authorities, municipalities, and civil society organizations” on CVE.⁵⁷

Sweden faces a significant challenge in integrating the large number of asylum seekers and economic migrants it has accepted post-2015. Sweden took in 163,000 asylum seekers in 2015, mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. This is the equivalent of the U.S. accepting 5.2 million asylum seekers in a single year. Sweden also took in more child refugees than any other country. However, the use of x-rays to prove the age of applicants is voluntary, and inevitably, some applicants are older than 18.⁵⁸

In January 2016, Sweden projected that up to 80,000 asylum applicants would be rejected.⁵⁹ Yet one official suggested that around 50,000 of those who should leave will more likely end up staying.⁶⁰ This is no surprise: The ability to deport those without identity papers, or who come from war zones or countries with questionable human rights records, is an ongoing concern for European nations. One such individual—an asylum seeker from Uzbekistan called Rakhmat Akilov—carried out the April 2017 vehicular attack in Stockholm. For such reasons, some in Stockholm suggest that the Swedish Migration Agency needs to cooperate more closely with the security services.⁶¹

There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that integration has not been successful. Around 23 percent of non-European immigrants in Sweden are unemployed, compared to 4 percent of Swedish citizens.⁶² Gang violence largely emanates from immigrant communities, with gang-linked firearms murders sharply rising.⁶³ Sexual assaults are committed disproportionately by those with an immigrant background.⁶⁴

Yet despite all this, Swedish officials have a generally relaxed attitude to asylum, viewing their willingness to take in large numbers of asylum seekers as a global obligation, and their welcome to refugees as a boost to the economy.

They point to their perceived success in integrating those fleeing the Balkans in the 1990s, and express confidence that jobs can be created, housing offered, and education provided for these recent arrivals. However, as of May 2016, less than 500 of the 163,000 arrivals from the previous year had managed to find employment.⁶⁵

The perception at official levels of Sweden's previous success in integrating immigrants is not necessarily shared within broader society. One April 2018 poll by the European Commission showed that 73 percent of respondents do not believe that integration of immigrants had been successful in Sweden.⁶⁶ Voting patterns are beginning to reflect this concern and at least one stridently anti-immigration party—the Swedish Democrats—is gaining strength.

France

MY RESEARCH FOR THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION HAS REVEALED THAT FRANCE IS the European country most threatened by Islamism-inspired terrorism or acts of violence. And yet it also has a surprisingly successful pattern of Muslim integration into French society.

Between January 2014 and December 2018, France faced 87 publicly disclosed incidents, 30 of which led to either injuries or deaths.⁶⁷

In November 2017, the head of France's domestic security agency stated that around 18,000 radicalized terror suspects (up from 15,000 in 2016) were living in the country, with 4,000 regarded as particularly dangerous.⁶⁸ Approximately 1,000 adults traveled from France to Syria or Iraq. As of early fall 2017, 265 of them had been killed and 217 had returned.⁶⁹

Beyond France's immediate terror threat, Salafism is growing at a rapid pace. The French government's Central Territorial Intelligence Service assesses there to be between 30,000 and 50,000 Salafists in France today, up from just 5,000 in 2004. One report placed the number of Salafi mosques as having increased by 170 percent—from approximately 50 to 140—between 2010 and 2016.⁷⁰

Several explanations are offered to explain why Islamic radicalization is so prevalent in France, including France's fierce commitment to secularism, racist attitudes towards North African immigrants, and general hostility towards

Muslims. One *Time* article from January 2015 stated that France’s “radical brand of secularism” had set it on a “collision course with Islamic practices.”⁷¹

It is true that France wades into areas of religion that many other western European countries do not. The state is willing to shut down radical mosques.⁷² A former President has signed letters calling for sections of the Koran to be abrogated.⁷³ The niqab is banned in public spaces. And President Macron is considering ways of shutting down foreign funding of French mosques.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, many French Muslims have successfully integrated into French society. Perhaps French dedication to nationhood and secular values has bolstered Muslim assimilation. One pertinent example is the large number of French Muslims who are willing to fight and die for their country.

Somewhere between 10 and 20 percent of the French military is Muslim. (Since France does not officially break down its population according to religion, precise numbers are unavailable.)⁷⁵ According to Pew, there are almost six million Muslims living in France, representing some 8.8 percent of the total population.⁷⁶ Therefore, roughly 26,500 to 53,000 Muslims are serving in the French Armed Forces, and even fighting in Muslim-majority countries like Afghanistan.

The number of French Muslims willing to serve their country is also reflected in the identity of terrorism victims in France: Two of the three soldiers killed by Mohammed Merah in March 2012 were Muslims. So too was one of the police officers killed in the al-Qaeda attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015.

French Muslims’ disproportionate representation in the French Army becomes even more impressive when compared to other countries. For example, the UK had a proud tradition of Indian Muslims fighting for the Empire in both World Wars.^{77,78} Today, however, only 0.3 percent of the Armed Forces are Muslim (650 individuals).⁷⁹ To say this is disproportionately low is an understatement: In 2016, Pew estimated that there were just over 4 million Muslims in the UK, which is 6.3 percent of the overall population.⁸⁰

France’s approaches toward deradicalization has differed from those of other European countries. Its policy has been less community-led and more reliant on psychology and social care. Unfortunately, in light of recent history, any French skepticism towards its de-radicalization initiatives would be understandable.

In 2016, counter-radicalization units were established for a series of Islamist prisoners who—while assessed to be potentially violent—were viewed by authorities as capable of rehabilitation. They were provided with access to psychologists, religious instruction in Islam, language classes, and a variety of workshops.⁸¹ Regrettably, these prisoners used this opportunity to plan an attack in which an inmate, who had previously attempted to travel to Syria, managed to stab two prison

wardens.⁸² The counter-radicalization units were scrapped in less than a year.

Another high-profile disappointment was the Centre for Prevention, Integration and Citizenship, a state-run initiative in which up to 25 radicalized individuals could voluntarily enroll for a 10-month program. They were offered housing, classes on subjects such as history and religion, and psychological treatment. However, enrollment numbers were low and nobody completed the program. The center opened in September 2016 and was shut down by the following July.⁸³

Despite these unsuccessful experiments, the French government is now initiating a more proactive approach to prevention. It not only focuses on violent Islamism, but also seeks to confront the entire ideology that feeds it. In February 2018, France launched a National Plan to Prevent Radicalization, which listed sixty specific measures “to refocus the prevention policy.”⁸⁴

The plan takes a wide-ranging approach, delving into everything from education, sports, local government, and private enterprise. The measures include developing support for secularism, use of counter-narratives, greater government oversight over private and home schooling, faster removal of illegal online terrorist content, training teachers to spot signs of radicalization, and more involvement from mental health professionals.

It is too early to assess the success of this approach. One official remarked, however, that while certain approaches may be unlikely to work, the government needs to try them anyway.⁸⁵

Conclusion

EUROPE FACES A MASSIVE SET OF CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO SECURITY, ISLAMIST radicalization, and integration of people from Muslim-majority countries. If current trends continue, more terrorist attacks will occur, segregation will deepen, and social cohesion will deteriorate. Elections across Europe in recent years have shown that voters will increasingly turn towards ever more radical political parties that promise to fix such problems.

Determining the precise way for politicians and policymakers to navigate this morass is extraordinarily daunting. To comprehensively mitigate the impact of Islamism in Europe is clearly beyond the ability of any one leader or administration.

From a philosophical perspective, a good starting point is to recognize the nature of the challenge that Islamism—in both its violent and non-violent forms—poses. Many Europeans still argue that focusing on non-violent Islamist ideology

is counter-productive. Their refusal to censure all Islamist ideology leads to Islamist narratives being infused into the European discourse with great regularity. This can only result in direct Islamist engagement with European governments. It will also permit prominent proponents of Islamist rhetoric to find platforms in the media and in universities.

Essentially, governments need to recognize that non-violent Islamist ideology plays a major role in supporting and generating violent Islamism. When carried out with that in mind, prevention programs would have a more significant capability to reduce the threat.

Domestically, there also needs to be a heightened focus on integration. Unfortunately, every integration model in Europe has, in varying degrees, failed. Perhaps the most paradoxical example is France: a country where segregation is so pronounced, yet also one able to offer a sense of national identity that transcends—or complements—religion.

While a stronger sense of national identity can potentially reduce the appeal of Islamism, a path toward forging national loyalty and patriotism is much less clear. And the likelihood that government bureaucrats can achieve such a goal successfully is uncertain at best.

Meantime, European countries tend to be anxious, for obvious historical reasons, about excessive displays of nationalist fervor.

The integration of some Muslim populations into European political and religious life was an urgent and complex problem even before 2015, and it is likely to become far more difficult now as European Islamist fighters seek to return from Syria, and as the number of refugees and asylum seekers increases. Europe can make this task easier for itself by deporting those who are illegally in their countries, as well as by reducing the number of newcomers every year. There is ample polling to show that these tactics would be popular with voters. Still, a lack of political will or desire among authorities, along with the aforementioned legal complications, may prevent it.

Overseas, the continuing meltdown of order in the Middle East and North Africa and the Sahel makes it clear that a stronger border defense will not be enough to secure Europe. European governments will need to do far more in conjunction with the U.S. to help friendly governments in the Middle East deal with the unprecedented challenges they face.

Despite these challenges, it is not too late for Europe to address the perilous political and security challenges it faces. But better policies require a philosophical sea change, not just marginal adjustments and tweaks to current policies.

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The Unfinished History Between America and the Muslim Brotherhood

By Mohamed-Ali Adraoui

ON JULY 11, 2018 THE U.S. CONGRESS'S SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL Security organized a series of hearings on “The Muslim Brotherhood’s Global Threat.”¹ The purpose was to determine what dangers the Muslim Brotherhood poses to American interests around the world. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which has long been considered by scholars to be the “mother” organization of modern Islamism, was described in the congressional hearings as a “a radical Islamist organization that has generated a network of related movements in 70 countries,” including al-Qaeda. Many at the hearings clearly wanted the U.S. Government to officially designate the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. For years, the United States has labelled other Islamist movements, such as Hezbollah and the Brotherhood-offshoot Hamas, as terrorist organizations. However, so far no such steps have been taken by the U.S. Government regarding the Muslim Brotherhood.

For decades, the U.S. has known about the strongly anti-Western and anti-liberal ideological and political agenda of the Brotherhood and its principal leaders, including its founder, Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949). Even so, U.S. diplomacy has never entered into direct conflict with the *Ikhwan* (Arabic for the “Brothers”). Indeed, when Banna first established the Brotherhood in 1928 and formulated its ideology of Islamic reform and revivalism, his notoriously anti-Western views were in direct response to British imperial rule over Egypt. America, a democratic republic, has always sought for itself a different role in Middle East, with the goal of ensuring its national interests while maintaining stability through a network of alliances and partnerships with other sovereign nations. Because of this, the U.S. has periodically tried to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood for various reasons.

During the Cold War, in fact, the U.S. seemed to be cultivating a close, even instrumental relationship with the Ikhwan. For some Americans, the Brotherhood seemed potentially useful to the promotion of American interests in Egypt, the world’s largest Arab country, and elsewhere. Declassified State Department archives shed light on the interactions between the global superpower and the Muslim Brotherhood, revealing American fluctuation between deep reluctance and interest in engaging with the Egyptian Islamist movement.

“The Fanatic Ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood”

ALTHOUGH THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1928, IT WAS NOT until 1944 that the U.S. Embassy in Cairo produced its initial report on the Islamist movement. Apparently, the early years of the Brotherhood failed to gain the attention of America’s diplomats. In the 1930s, U.S. relations with Egypt were motivated primarily by a rather small set of economic interests. By the Second World War, business interests were unsurprisingly trumped by strategic considerations in Europe and North Africa, and U.S. diplomats in Cairo at the time showed little interest in social and religious trends in Egyptian society.

By the late 1940s, however, the Brotherhood had made itself known to U.S. diplomats. Brotherhood members sent no fewer than 320 letters to the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, mostly protesting American support for the Zionist settlement of Israel/Palestine. They also voiced opposition to France’s granting of citizenship

to some Algerian Muslims, as this was seen as a ploy by Paris to avoid granting independence to Algeria. These letters generated the first American diplomatic telegrams recognizing the rise of “a Fanatical Moslem Society” called “Ikhwan El-Muslimin (Moslem Brotherhood)”² in Egypt.

In the early 1950s, when containing the spread of Soviet communism was foremost on the U.S. policy agenda, American officials continued to view the Muslim Brotherhood as a fanatical movement professing an ideology that taught followers to “hate all non-Muslims” and to advocate for the implementation of “the Koranic law.” The U.S. also worried that the Brotherhood could become violent. However, following the 1952 military revolution in Egypt and rise to power of the charismatic President Gamal Abdel Nasser, U.S. officials began to fear an Egyptian rapprochement with the Soviet Union. This led the U.S. to reconsider the Muslim Brotherhood, which came to be described in official cables not as fanatics, but as “orthodox believers.”

Subsequently, regular meetings were held at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo between the American Chargé d'affaires Frank Gaffney and the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Hudaybi. By the mid-1950s, when relations between the Ikhwan and Egypt's military rulers collapsed after an initial period of cooperation, the U.S.'s engagement with the Brotherhood came to be seen increasingly by American diplomats as a possible opportunity to pressure the Soviet-aligned military government in Cairo.

During the Cold War years, however, the Muslim Brotherhood never occupied a central role in U.S. diplomatic analysis and activities in Egypt. U.S. officials recognized the Ikhwan as an important religious and political movement in the country. But as a political actor, the Brotherhood was considered far less consequential and secondary compared to the military, the monarchy, the Wafd Party and the communists. It was only later, when the Brotherhood became the last remaining potential source of opposition to President Nasser, that the U.S. began to take more of an active interest in it.

Diplomatic reports do not suggest the U.S. had any specific policy regarding the Muslim Brotherhood, and they never clearly state that the Brotherhood could be a potential U.S. ally in opposing Nasser or Soviet communism. The archives do, however, highlight every occasion in which the Ikhwan opposed Nasser's military regime. The fact that the Brotherhood's rhetoric and demonstrations against the military regime in Cairo were systematically reported provides clear evidence that American diplomats were paying close attention to the growing antagonism between the two parties.

By the 1960s, after the Nasser government and the Brotherhood had finally

turned against each other, the Ikhwan disappeared entirely from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo's reports. At the time, thwarting Nasser's growing influence certainly remained a top priority for the U.S. But getting access to members of the Ikhwan became significantly more difficult for American diplomats, particularly as the Cairo government intensified its repression and persecution of the Islamist movement along with its other domestic enemies.

This period of Nasserist repression, which came to be known by the Brotherhood as the "Ordeal," generated ideological rifts in Egyptian Islamism and contributed to its further radicalization. Some members of the Brotherhood, including Sayyid Qutb, rejected the purportedly "gradualist" approach to Islamic reform and revival of Banna and the Ikhwan's founding generations. They instead began to embrace an agenda of radical withdrawal from "un-Islamic" Egypt under Nasser, including violent struggle.

Despite this, Qutb is only mentioned a handful of times in American diplomatic records, even though he had emerged as the top Brotherhood ideologist of the 1950s. Qutb's execution by Egypt's government in 1966 was noted only in passing in the U.S. Embassy's dispatches. American diplomatic reporting, in fact, seemed not to be aware of the rifts in the Egyptian Islamic movement, or of the growing radicalism in its ranks. Instead, the principal concern for the U.S. was the Brotherhood's relative ability to exert pressure on Nasser's decisions—this at a time when his regime's relations with the Soviet Union were still close, but potentially vulnerable.

Interestingly, the Islamic character of the revolution in Iran of 1978-1979, which came to be led by Khomeini and Shiite Islamists, is never discussed in U.S. diplomatic dispatches from Cairo in the early 1980s. In fact, the dramatic events in Iran and the growing radicalization in Egyptian Islamism were regarded as separate, and U.S. officials in Cairo showed no apparent concern that the Iranian Revolution might trigger a wave of similarly inspired Islamic revolts in Egypt and other Muslim countries. Indeed, throughout the early 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood was viewed simply as an Egyptian Islamic organization. The Ikhwan was not, in fact, seen as part of the larger, broad-based Islamic resurgence which transformed the political landscape of many Muslim societies in the 1970s and 1980s.

As such, after the 1981 assassination of President Anwar Sadat, the religious affiliation of the president's assassins—the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, an offshoot of the Brotherhood—was barely debated in U.S. reports from Cairo. In fact, the Brotherhood was never mentioned as potentially responsible for Sadat's killing, nor was there any acknowledgment of Qutb's (or the Iranian revolution's) ideological influence on Egyptian Islamist radicalism. If anything, the Egyptian

president's murder was understood by many inside the State Department to have been a communist initiative, according to a former director of the State Department's Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs. The communist aim was to weaponize Muslim political grievances to thwart the pro-U.S. turn that Egyptian policy took under Sadat.

Thus, during the 1980s, the idea of radical Islam never appeared in American diplomatic reports, nor in official U.S. policy statements about the Middle East. Interviews with top U.S. diplomats and policymakers confirm that the concept of a transnational Islamic movement or of "Islamism" was essentially absent in American thinking at that time.

Islamism and Islam in the American Debate after 9/11

THIS SITUATION CHANGED IN THE EARLY 1990S, AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE Soviet Union as the principal threat to the U.S., and the failure of communism as a revolutionary ideology. Then, some American policymakers began to see the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and related movements that it helped to inspire—like Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), or Hamas—as part of a transnational Islamic ideological movement that, like communism before it, was capable of damaging America's global interests.

Ambassador Edward Djerejian expressed this concern explicitly in his famous "Meridian Speech" on June 4, 1992. For the first time, a top U.S. official described "religious or political extremism" as a growing danger to stability in the Middle East and a threat to other American interests. From then on, "Islamic fundamentalism" was more frequently identified as an ongoing concern for U.S. diplomacy. At the same time, a new American debate emerged over the wisdom and utility of diplomatic engagement with non-violent "fundamentalist" movements like the Muslim Brotherhood.

As it happened, the U.S. Embassy in Cairo maintained contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the early 1990s. The Islamic movement was seen as an important player in the Egyptian arena and to the future of the country. However, the Brotherhood was also still outlawed in Egypt, and the authoritarian Hosni Mubarak regime vigorously protested when its American ally sought to

engage with its domestic Islamist opponent. As a result, the U.S. ceased its diplomatic outreach to the Brotherhood in the second half of the 1990s.

Then came al-Qaeda's September 11, 2001 attacks on the American homeland. That stunning assault profoundly enlarged and intensified the United States' discussion about the threats posed by Islamism or radical Islam. Clearly, Brotherhood ideologists, such as Sayyid Qutb had directly influenced the growth of al-Qaeda. But there was also an ongoing dispute over ideology and strategy between the Brotherhood's brand of "political Islam" and the transnational jihadist movement. As a result, intense debate raged within Washington's circles of influence and beyond, assessing the dangers of the Brotherhood and its formative role in the emergence of modern Islamism. Two divergent views emerged in the American academy and among policymakers.

One perspective saw Islamism as a modern political ideology and movement which was unique to Muslim societies. In particular, Islamism was understood as a form of political (rather than religious) conservatism, which began with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and successfully spread around the world. While Islamism drew on Muslim identity, frustrations and grievances, it was not a religious movement *per se*, but essentially a modern political response to the intractable authoritarianism and other political woes afflicting many Muslim-majority societies.

Alternatively, other analysts began to see the 9/11 attacks as the violent expression not of a political ideology, but of the Islamic belief system, or of an essentialist Muslim interpretation of Islam, with all that entails for modern politics and violence. For example, in a 2003 Rand Corporation report, *Civil Democratic Islam*, political scientist Cheryl Benard explicitly linked the issue of democratization and reform within Muslim societies to the issue of secularization.³ In this view, the threat of radical Islam and the lack of democracy in Muslim societies could only be dealt with through religious, rather than political, reform.

These two views counseled two very different policy approaches to dealing with Islamism, including diplomatic engagement with the Brotherhood. President George W. Bush, for instance, emphasized the active promotion of democratic reform in Muslim societies. For many at the time, there was an over-arching belief that even a reactive political ideology like that of the Brotherhood could be gradually transformed and moderated through democratic enlargement.⁴ Under this democracy promotion rubric, American diplomats renewed their outreach to individuals and groups within the Brotherhood-inspired transnational movement of political Islam.

In contrast to Bush's democratic idealism, President Barack Obama took a

decidedly more “realist” view of the Brotherhood and Islamism. Before his election, Obama publicly revealed his suspicions about the Muslim Brotherhood, describing them as the “fathers” of political Islam and Islamist radicalism, “untrustworthy,” “harboring anti-American views,” and probably “not honoring the Camp David Peace Treaty with Israel.”⁵

For President Obama, Islamism or political Islam was a modern organic outgrowth of Muslim politics and culture, and in particular, of an essentialist and highly conservative interpretation of Islam. Later in his presidency, for instance, Obama stated in an interview with *The Atlantic*’s Jeffrey Goldberg that “there is ... the need for Islam as a whole to challenge that interpretation of Islam, to isolate it, and to undergo a vigorous discussion within their community about how Islam works as part of a peaceful, modern society.” In contrast to Bush, however, Obama did not believe this religious and political change within Islam could be imposed or catalyzed from the outside. Instead, it needed to occur from within Muslim societies and through the leadership of Muslims.

Increasingly, it appeared that many American scholars and leading officials from across the political spectrum shared Obama’s realist perspective on the Brotherhood and modern Islamism. There was far less agreement, however, on the issue of diplomatic engagement with the Brotherhood. Some still supported connecting with the Brotherhood, believing the Islamist movement might become more secular, pluralistic and democratic when operating in a freer, more democratic political space. Others, however, maintained that engaging the Brotherhood would not be a prudent policy unless the movement secularized and disavowed its anti-pluralistic, anti-Western agenda. Besides, the Brotherhood was still officially outlawed in Egypt and in other countries. This American debate remained frozen until the popular uprisings in 2011 known as the “Arab Spring.”

The Door Opens for the Ikhwan

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT HOSNI MUBARAK’S POWER BEGAN TO FALTER IN JANUARY and February of 2011. That same year, after the outbreak of the revolution in Tunisia, many Egyptians expressed the desire to see their own president removed. In the early days of Egypt’s protest movement—in which hundreds of thousands eventually converged on Tahrir Square—U.S. officials were primarily concerned about Mubarak’s situation. However, by the time it became clear that his rule was

unsustainable, Mubarak had handed over power to a military board of directors.⁶

The Muslim Brotherhood, the most well-organized group potentially able to fill the resulting political vacuum in Cairo, reignited the debate about political Islam, which had persisted at the highest level of the U.S. leadership for nearly a decade. Confronted with Egypt's rapidly escalating protest movement (culminating on Friday, January 25, 2011 during the "Day of Rage"), the U.S. had to deal with the prospect of an Islamist-dominated government in Egypt, and this raised serious concerns.

Would a Brotherhood government, in fact, listen to the popular aspirations of the Egyptian people, including non-Islamists? Or would a Brotherhood government seek to consolidate power around its own Islamist agenda? It was in this context that then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in early 2011, "It's not America that put people into the streets of Tunis and Cairo." Secretary Clinton added that "these revolutions are not ours. They are not by us, for us, or against us."⁷ She noted, however, that the next Egyptian government needed to answer popular aspirations.⁸

During the months of March and April 2011, some U.S. policymakers and commentators warned about the Muslim Brotherhood's possible rise to power.⁹ As political upheaval worsened, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explicitly began to open the door to the Muslim Brothers. In fact, between Spring and Autumn 2011, Clinton spoke frequently about the need for dealing with the Islamist movement. Several senior diplomats and Pentagon officials said that they held "encouraging....conversations with an array of opposition leaders, including the Muslim Brotherhood."¹⁰ Later, the official position of the Obama Administration was clearly expressed in June 2011 by Secretary Clinton during a visit to Budapest:¹¹

We believe, given the changing political landscape in Egypt, that it is in the interests of the United States to engage with all parties that are peaceful and committed to nonviolence, that intend to compete for the parliament and the presidency (...) And we welcome, therefore, dialogue with those Muslim Brotherhood members who wish to talk with us.

The Obama Administration's diplomatic opening to the Islamists meant, by implication, that the U.S.'s previous support to friendly authoritarian rulers in certain Middle Eastern states was subject to criticism. Thus, in November 2011, Secretary Clinton said that "for years, dictators told their people they had to

accept the autocrats they knew to avoid, the extremists they feared....Too often, we accepted that narrative ourselves.”¹²

After succeeding Clinton as Secretary of State, John Kerry elaborated on this policy. He announced that the revolution in Egypt required a thorough reappraisal of past U.S. policy toward the country, warning that,¹³

Given the events of the past week, some are criticizing America’s past tolerance of the Egyptian regime. It is true that our public rhetoric did not always match our private concerns. But there also was a pragmatic understanding that our relationship benefited American foreign policy and promoted peace in the region. (...)

The United States must accompany our rhetoric with real assistance to the Egyptian people. For too long, financing Egypt’s military has dominated our alliance. The proof was seen over the weekend: tear gas canisters marked “Made in America” fired at protesters, United States-supplied F-16 jet fighters streaking over central Cairo. Congress and the Obama administration need to consider providing civilian assistance that would generate jobs and improve social conditions in Egypt, as well as guarantee that American military assistance is accomplishing its goals (...)

Our interests are not served by watching friendly governments collapse under the weight of the anger and frustrations of their own people, nor by transferring power to radical groups that would spread extremism (...)

For three decades, the United States pursued a Mubarak policy. Now we must look beyond the Mubarak era and devise an Egyptian policy.

Throughout this period, it seemed the more American officials talked about the need to reform U.S. policy to deal with new realities in Egypt, the more the discussion about the Muslim Brotherhood itself faded into the background. Indeed, the more the Obama Administration insisted on the need for new political leadership in Egypt that would meet the people’s aspirations and govern inclusively, the less it focused on the question of Islamism alone.

Taming Political Islam

AFTER THE VICTORIES OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERS IN EGYPT'S 2012 PARLIAMENTARY and presidential elections, the possibility that it would harm American interests in the region remained a burning concern. The Arab world was aflame, and the U.S. continuously collected information and scrutinized what the Brotherhood said and did. Ambassador Anne Patterson's statements from this period make clear the U.S.'s distrust of the Brotherhood as well as the U.S.'s expectation the Islamist movement could become more moderate and democratic if the U.S. was able to find the right policy. In 2011, the ambassador stated she was "not personally comfortable enough yet with recognizing [the Brotherhood's] commitment to economic freedoms." She also highlighted concerns about the Brotherhood's "less liberal stances on women's rights," and its position on Egypt's 1978 peace treaty with Israel.¹⁴

Nonetheless, engaging the Brotherhood remained the rule for U.S. diplomacy. Secretary John Kerry recognized the Muslim Brothers' victories, while U.S. diplomats in Cairo clearly stated they wanted to work with the "winning parties" that emerged from the electoral process.

During this transitional period, the U.S.'s longstanding concerns about the Brotherhood's history of extremism and anti-Americanism underwent some adjustments. Washington officials advanced the idea that supporting the elected Brotherhood government and working with it could serve as a model and help to rein in the spread of violent Islamist movements elsewhere. Jeffrey Feltman, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs, elaborated,

We know that parties rooted in religious faiths will play larger roles. We do not yet know what the U.S. relationship will be over the long term with emerging governments, parliaments, and civil society in these countries. We do know, however, that it will be vital that the United States establish and maintain the types of partnerships that help us protect and promote our interests and that give us the ability to help shape and influence outcomes (...)

Our support for legitimate governments is the best means of countering violent extremism. The peaceful transitions in Tunisia

and Egypt fundamentally undermine the extremist message that violence is the only path for political change. Providing an opportunity for an alternative, non-violent path to genuine political transition delegitimizes extremist groups and reduces their appeal.

Subsequently, in the course of 2012, numerous high-level meetings took place between Brotherhood leaders and U.S. officials. In April of that year, the White House hosted a delegation of Brotherhood representatives. This transpired only a few months after top U.S. representatives (including William Burns, responsible for relations with the Ikhwan) were received in Cairo.

Throughout these regular exchanges, the U.S. was clear about its hopes and expectations that the new government would govern Egypt inclusively and responsibly. U.S. officials highlighted that the Brotherhood's leaders had "been very specific about conveying a moderate message—on regional security and domestic issues, and economic issues, as well."¹⁵

Thanks to the Brotherhood's responsible conduct on economic reform and other issues, U.S. officials reported on their government favorably. During the Gaza conflict in November 2012, the Brothers' ability to pressure Hamas was described as a "positive" by American observers. In turn, the U.S.'s financial, military and diplomatic arrangements with Egypt that were in force during Mubarak's presidency were not changed. For example, the sum of 1.55 billion dollars, which Washington had historically allocated for military assistance to Egypt, continued to be paid. For American officials, this was intended to finance ongoing efforts to secure the Sinai region, which remained critical to both Egyptian and Israeli security.¹⁶

Then, in July 2013, intensifying unrest in Cairo and moves by the Brotherhood to arrogate more power to themselves to the detriment of the military prompted some U.S. officials to openly worry about a possible coup. Still, as the Brotherhood and military power struggle deepened, U.S. officials did not indicate support for the overthrow of the elected government. But, as Egypt deteriorated still further, the Egyptian military intervened, evicting the Brotherhood from power and arresting President Morsi. A few days after the army's takeover, President Obama stated that,

We are deeply concerned by the decision of the Egyptian Armed Forces to remove President Morsi and suspend the Egyptian constitution. I now call on the Egyptian military to move quickly

and responsibly to return full authority back to a democratically elected civilian government as soon as possible through an inclusive and transparent process, and to avoid any arbitrary arrests of President Morsi and his supporters. Given today's developments, I have also directed the relevant departments and agencies to review the implications under U.S. law for our assistance to the Government of Egypt. The United States continues to believe firmly that the best foundation for lasting stability in Egypt is a democratic political order with participation from all sides and all political parties—secular and religious, civilian and military.

After the coup and election of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the U.S. sought to establish a new *modus vivendi* with the Sisi regime while not closing the door on the Brotherhood. This was a complicated issue for U.S. diplomats, not least because Egypt's military rulers had declared the Brotherhood "terrorists." In a clear articulation of U.S. policy, Elisabeth Jones, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, stated that,

Mr. Morsi proved unwilling or unable to govern inclusively, alienating many Egyptians. Responding to the desires of millions of Egyptians who believed the revolution had taken a wrong turn, and you saw a return to security and stability after years of unrest, the interim government replaced the Morsi government.

But the interim government has also made decisions inconsistent with inclusive democracy. We were troubled by the July 3 events and the violence of mid-August. The decision to remove Morsi, excessive force used against protesters in August; restrictions on the press, civil society and opposition parties; the continued detention of many members of the opposition; and the extension of the state of emergency have been troubling.

In September 2013, after Egypt's military-backed interim government (later ruled the *de facto* government by President Sisi) officially declared the Brotherhood a terrorist group, an Egyptian court banned the Islamist movement and security forces dismantled its ideological and social welfare networks. Despite this, on February 12, 2014, State Department spokesperson Marie Harf affirmed that the United States would not designate the Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

She also stated that Washington would continue to work with all sides and all parties in Egypt, including the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷

Conclusion

SINCE HIS ELECTION, PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP HAS SHOWN AN UNABASHED realism about the Middle East and the pursuit of American interests there. The Trump Administration has opposed the revolutionary Islamist regime in Iran and reinforced the U.S.'s alliances with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which have repudiated the Muslim Brotherhood as an extremist or terrorist organization. The U.S. and its Arab Gulf allies have also closed ranks in support of President Sisi's authoritarian regime in Egypt, and they appear united in their efforts to check or roll back the Brotherhood in the region. Meantime, the U.S.'s ties with Qatar—a key U.S. protectorate and security partner in the Gulf, but whose rulers are also major patrons of the Brotherhood and its agenda across the region—have not yet recovered from the 2017–2019 intra-Gulf diplomatic crisis.

This situation, in turn, has prompted many in Washington to more aggressively call for the U.S. to officially designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Blacklisting the Brotherhood would ban its members from traveling to the U.S. and make it a crime for any American to aid the movement. Although a decision on this issue appears to be under consideration, the Trump Administration has not yet formulated a clear policy regarding Islamist actors like the Brotherhood. Given the U.S.'s present diplomatic alignments and priorities, not to mention President Trump's essentialized and problematic views on Islam ("Islam hates us," he said as a candidate), it seems that designating the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization is seriously discussed, though likely not something that can be achieved politically.

While President Sisi and others want the U.S. to officially designate the Egyptian Brotherhood, such a policy would probably prove immensely complicated to implement elsewhere, given the transnational nature of the Brotherhood movement and the fact its affiliates are now ruling in Turkey (the AKP) and in the emerging democracy of Tunisia (Ennahda). Ennahda is a unique case, but so far it shows that when Brotherhood-inspired movements are in power, the goals of religious reform and renewal can be separated from and do not always have to contradict

or undermine democratic governance and pluralism, as well as meaningful economic reform.

Alternatively, the U.S. could adopt a wait and see approach in its policy toward the Brotherhood in Egypt. If the U.S. chooses this course, much will depend on whether the remnants of the Egyptian Brotherhood will have the capacity to survive in an increasingly closed and repressive political system. The Islamist movement's leadership has found refuge and a platform in AKP-led Turkey and elsewhere to oppose the authoritarian regime in Cairo, but the rest of the Brotherhood in Egypt have been driven underground. Given this situation, it is not clear yet whether the Egyptian Brotherhood will have any internal incentive or encouragement from inside or outside Egypt to secularize and promote a more pluralistic and democratic outlook. Already, some Brotherhood elements in Sisi's Egypt have embraced violence (as elements did during the "Ordeal" of the 1960s). In the future, it is also possible the Brotherhood will re-emerge as a formidable political force in Egypt. In that event, the old U.S. debates about the Brotherhood and its brand of political Islam will become new once again.

NOTES

1. <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/the-muslim-brotherhoods-global-threat/>.
2. Studying the archives makes it possible to observe that these letters are the reason for which, for the first time, an English-Arab translator was recruited by the U.S. Embassy, which had no such skills prior to that time.
3. Cheryl Benard, *Civil Democratic Islam. Partners, Resources and Strategies*. RAND, National Security Research Division, 2003.
4. Thus, in 2006, when George W. Bush was questioned about political participation of the Lebanese Hezbollah in the United States, he replied: "I like the idea of people running for office. There's a positive effect. Maybe some will run for office and say, 'Vote for me. I look forward to blowing up America.' But I don't think so. I think people who generally run for office say, 'Vote for me. I'm looking forward to fixing your potholes.'" Shadi Hamid, *The Enduring Challenge of Engaging Islamists: Lessons from Egypt*, Brookings Institution, Project on Middle East Democracy, 2014.
5. Fawaz A. Gerges, "What Changes have taken place in US foreign policy toward Islamists?" *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 6(2), 2013, 189-197.
6. Interview with Frank Wisner, former Ambassador in Egypt and Obama's special Envoy to Egypt in February 2011, on April 16, 2019.

7. Shadi Hamid, and Peter Mandaville, (2013) “Bringing the United States Back into the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly*, 36(4), 2013, 95-105.
8. Sanger, D. E. (2011, February 5), “As Mubarak Digs In, U.S. Policy in Egypt Is Complicated.” *New York Times*, A12. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/world/middleeast/06policy.html?pagewanted=all>.
9. Fawaz A. Gerges, “The Obama Approach to the Middle East: the End of America’s Moment?” *International Affairs*, 89(2), 2013, 299-323.
10. Sanger, D. E. (2011, February 5). “As Mubarak Digs In, U.S. Policy in Egypt Is Complicated,” *New York Times*, A12. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/world/middleeast/06policy.html?pagewanted=all>.
11. Sheridan, M. B., (2011, June 30), “U.S. to expand relations with Muslim Brotherhood,” *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-to-expand-relations-with-muslim-brotherhood/2011/06/30/AGVgppsH_story.html.
12. Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Obama Approach to the Middle East...*, *op.cit.*
13. Kerry, J. (2011, January 31). “Allying Ourselves With the Next Egypt” [Op-Ed], *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/01/opinion/01kerry.html>.
14. Negrin, M. and Abdellatif, R. (2011), “US ambassador to Egypt won’t sit down with Muslim Brotherhood...Yet.” *GlobalPost*. Retrieved from <http://www.pri.org/stories/2011-10-18/us-ambassador-egypt-won-t-sit-down-muslim-brotherhoodyet>.
15. Sheridan, M. B., (2011, June 30), “U.S. to expand relations with Muslim Brotherhood,” *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-to-expand-relations-with-muslim-brotherhood/2011/06/30/AGVgppsH_story.html.
16. Fawaz A. Gerges, “What Changes have taken place in US foreign policy toward Islamists?” *op.cit.*
17. “The United States does not—has not designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. We have been very clear in Egypt that we will work with all sides and all parties to help move an inclusive process forward. We’ve also repeatedly, both publicly and privately, called on the interim government to move forward in an inclusive manner. That means talking to all parties, bringing them into the process. We’re not saying what the future government should look like specifically other than that it should be inclusive. That, of course, includes the Muslim Brotherhood. We will continue talking to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as part of our broad outreach to the different parties and groups there.”

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